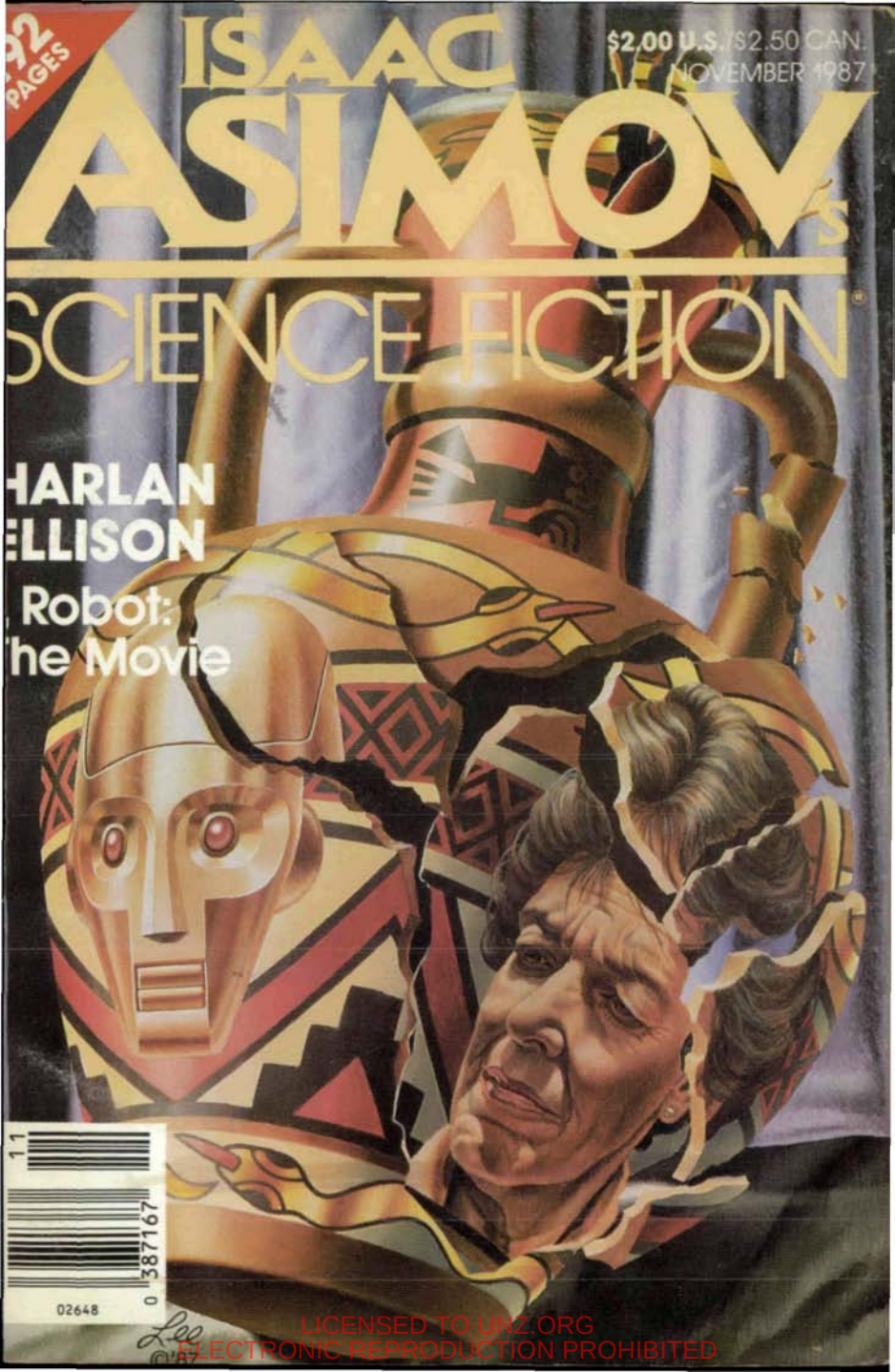

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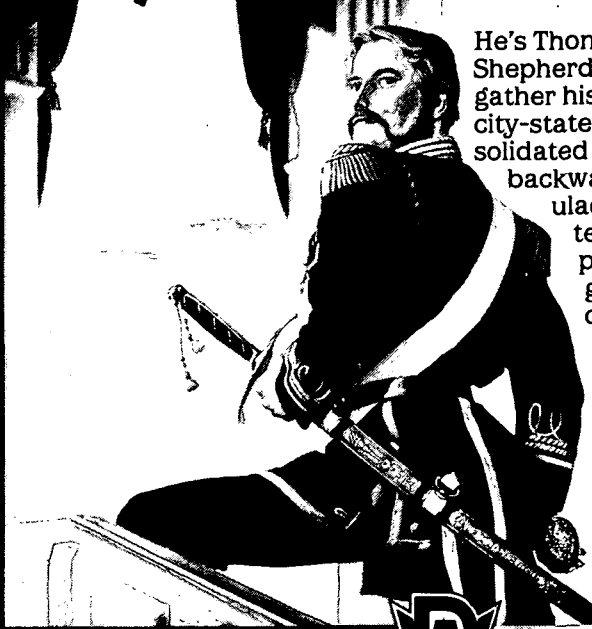

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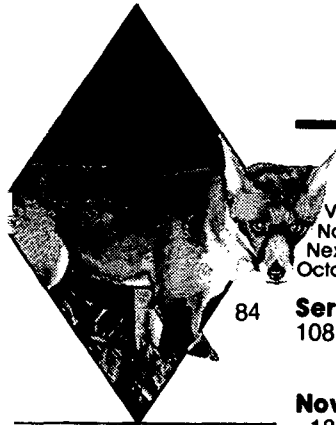

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November 1987
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October 20, 1987

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EDITORIAL

by Isaac Asimov

SURVIVORS

Martin H. Greenberg and I have co-edited a series of anthologies for Daw Books, which include the best stories of a given year. We began with the best of 1939 (a book that appeared in 1979), and proceeded year by year until in 1986, the 15th volume appeared with the best of 1953. In press (as I write this) is volume 16 which deals with the best of 1954, and in preparation is volume 17 which deals with the best of 1955.

For each of these books, Marty writes a general introduction outlining the events of the year, both in the real world of science fiction, and in the imaginary world of the great outside. We then each supply a headnote for each of the stories in the volume. Marty's headnotes deal with the science fiction writer's career, while I write on some subject or other that either the author or the story has inspired in my weird brain.

I read Marty's headnotes with avidity for they always tell me more about the writer than I know, but not more than I want to know, of course.

One thing that I've noticed, with some curiosity, is that science fiction writers tend to have a ten-year lifespan, or, if anything, less.

That is, they will write science fiction, sometimes copiously, for ten years or less, and then they will dwindle off and fade to a halt. Sometimes, they don't even dwindle, they simply stop dead. It leaves me wondering why.

One explanation, of course, is that they find other and more lucrative markets. John D. MacDonald wrote science fiction in his early years and then made the big time in mystery thrillers. John Jakes wrote science fiction in *his* early years and then made the big time in historical fiction.

Another explanation is that they die—even science fiction writers die. Back in the 1950s, Cyril Kornbluth and Henry Kuttner died while each was at the peak of his career, and more recently the same was true for Philip K. Dick and Frank Herbert.

But there are those who simply stop and end what seems a fruitful career without switching to other fields and while remaining vigorously alive. I can even think of names of fresh young writers who graced the pages of this magazine

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in its early issues whom we (or anyone else) don't hear from much anymore.

Why is that? Do they run out of ideas? Do they simply get tired of writing? Does science fiction change into new channels with which they are out of sympathy?

I simply don't know.

Perhaps this is something that is true of all forms of writing and not of science fiction alone. Perhaps it is true of all forms of creative endeavor. Perhaps "burnout" is a common phenomenon which ought to be studied more than it is—by psychologists, not by me.

But if burnout is common, then what about those cases in which burnout does *not* occur? It may be just as useful to study those who are burnout-immune, and who have been writing high-quality science fiction steadily, prolifically, and successfully for, say, forty years and more, and who show no signs of breaking under the strain.

Lately, I have noticed that such people are termed "dinosaurs" by some observers in the field. I suspect that the term is used pejoratively; that is, it is *not* used as a compliment. From the things they have to say about the writers they call "dinosaurs," I gather that, like the *real* dinosaurs, these writers are considered to be ancient, clumsy, and outmoded.

The term, however, is particularly inappropriate because the characteristic that we most associate with the real dinosaurs is that they are extinct, while the char-

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acteristic most noticeable about the writing "dinosaurs" is that they are *not* extinct. As a matter of fact, I gather from the nature of the comments made about the "dinosaurs" that those who use the term are rather aggrieved at them for *not* being extinct and for hogging too much of the spotlight for far too much time.

Well, that's *their* problem. For myself, I prefer to use the term "survivors," which is neither pejorative nor complimentary, but merely factual.

What are the characteristics that would qualify a science fiction writer to be a survivor?

To begin with, since I talked about a successful and steady and prolific writing life of at least forty years, a survivor would have to be at least sixty years old, and alive, and working. Naturally, he would have had to have started at quite a young age and been swatting away at it steadily since then.

I can think, off-hand, of nine writers who fulfill these qualifications, and here they are:

1) *Jack Williamson.* His first story was published in 1928, when he was twenty years old. He has been writing steadily for fifty-nine years, and he is now eighty years old. To me, he is the undoubted and well-beloved dean of science fiction. His "The Legion of Space," which bounced me off the wall when I was a teenager, appeared fifty-three years ago.

2) *Clifford D. Simak.* His first story was published in 1931, when he was twenty-seven years old. He has been writing steadily for fifty-six years and he is now eighty-two years old. His "City" appeared forty-three years ago, and "Cosmic Engineers" forty-eight years ago.

3) *L. Sprague de Camp.* His first story was published in 1937, when he was thirty years old. He has been writing steadily for forty-nine years and is now seventy-nine years old. His "Lest Darkness Fall" which I read in preference to studying for an all-important test in physical chemistry (without ever regretting it) appeared forty-eight years ago.

4) *Isaac Asimov.* (You didn't think I'd leave myself out through some perverted notion of modesty, did you?) My first story was published in March, 1939, when I was nineteen. I have been writing steadily for forty-eight years, and I am now sixty-seven years old. My story "Nightfall" appeared forty-six years ago.

5) *Robert Heinlein.* His first story was published in August, 1939, when he was thirty-two. He has been writing steadily for forty-eight years and he is now eighty years old. His "Blowups Happen" appeared forty-seven years ago.

6) *Fritz Leiber.* His first story was published in August, 1939, when he was twenty-nine. He has been writing steadily for forty-eight years and he is now seventy-six years old. His "Conjure Wife" appeared forty-four years ago.

7) *Frederik Pohl.* It's hard to say because so much of his early stuff appeared under pseudonyms of one

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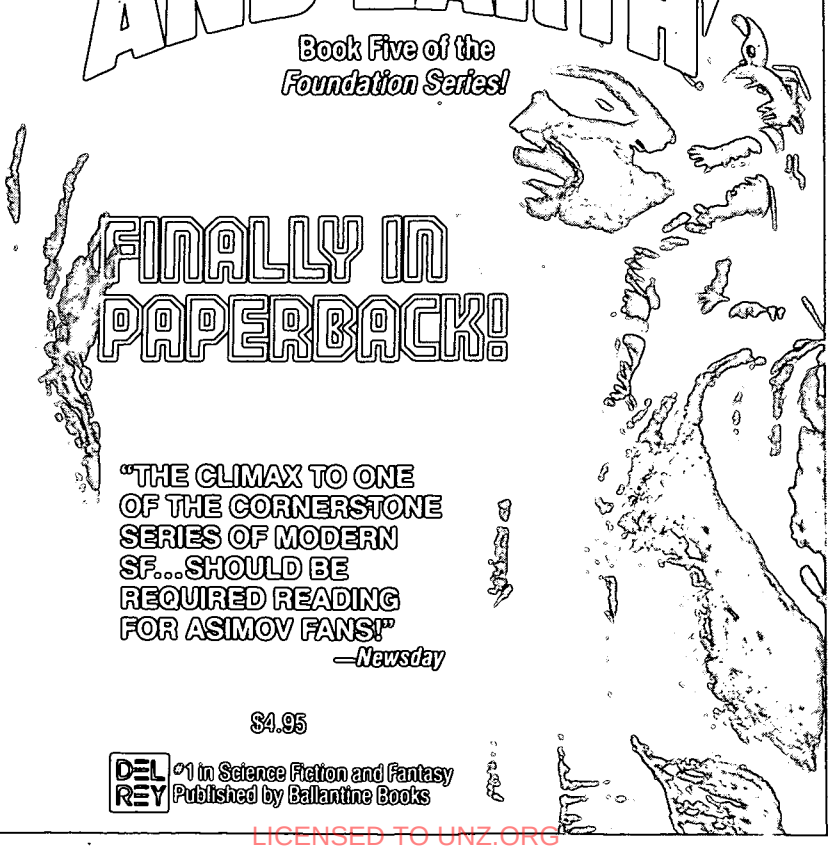

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sort or another, but an undoubted story of his appeared in 1941 when he was twenty-one. He has been writing steadily for forty-six years, and he is now sixty-seven years old. His "Gravy Planet" ("Space Merchants") appeared thirty-five years ago.

8) *Arthur C. Clarke.* His first story appeared in 1946, when he was twenty-nine. He has been writing steadily for forty-one years, and he is now seventy years old. His "Rescue Party" appeared forty-one years ago.

9) *Poul Anderson.* His first story appeared in 1947, when he was twenty-one. He has been writing steadily for forty years, and is now sixty-one years old. His "The Helping Hand" appeared thirty-seven years ago.

I don't pretend that this list is necessarily definitive. Offhand, I can think of three other possible survivors. Lester del Rey's first story was published in 1938, while A. E. van Vogt and Alfred Bester were each first published in 1939. In recent decades, however, they have not published much, so I can't honestly deny burn-out in their cases.

If we look at the list, we can come to some conclusions, I think. In the first place, the survivors were all science fiction fans from a very early age, and gained a life-long fascination with the field. That *must* be so.

Secondly, each must be a non-suffering writer. Lots of good writers, even great writers, don't necessarily like to write, and must force themselves to do so. This doesn't prevent them from writing well, you understand, but it does prevent them from writing a *lot,* and my qualification for being a survivor is that one writes steadily and prolifically.

Thirdly, each resists the notion of abandoning science fiction. It is not likely that survivors can write only SF and nothing else. To my knowledge, Simak, Pohl, and Anderson have written good nonfiction; Clarke and de Camp have written quite a bit of good nonfiction; and I have written a thundering lot of it. In addition, Pohl has written mainstream fiction (he has a new novel entitled "Chernobyl" that's coming out —very unusual and *not* science fiction). De Camp has written excellent historical novels. As for me, I have written a great deal of mystery fiction. In every case, however, no matter how they stray, these survivors always return to science fiction.

There you are. "Dinosaurs"? I think not. I think the survivors (even I) are the great pillars of science fiction. I wonder how many more of them will appear in the future. ●

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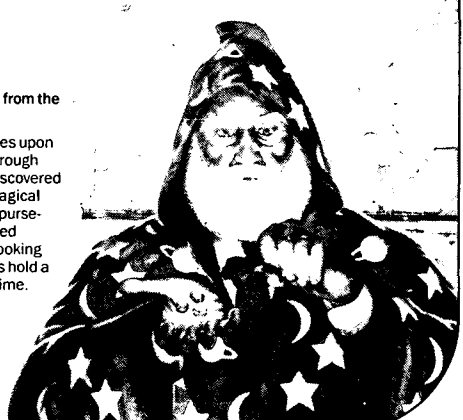

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LETTERS

Dear Gardner,

As a faithful subscriber to *IAsfm,* I favor stories with sex, violence, and downbeat endings. You can tell the publishers I would be very distressed if those elements vanished and the magazine became squeaky-clean—and so would all the other readers I know.

Sincerely,

Martha Soukup
Albuquerque, NM

I doubt that our magazine will ever get squeaky-clean unless the Great American Public should elect Pat Robertson, in which case squeaky-clean magazines will be the very least of our troubles.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear *IAsfm,*

I have been a gluttonous consumer of science fiction literature as far back as I can remember. Being only twenty-seven years old, one of my fondest memories of my childhood was being allowed to see the movie "Silent Running," which, I believe, was the catalyst responsible for my later obsession with SF literature. Up through the years, the world has seen a lot of excellent SF movies, culminating in *2001, Star Wars,* etc. In later years, the media explosion has made almost every major SF movie available to the general public via satellites, video cassettes, and laser discs. I believe that a splendid magazine like yours cannot afford to ignore the enormous influence movies like *E.T.* have on your public. I'm sure I speak for a lot of people when I ask you to consider the possibility of introducing a column reviewing old and new SF movies and their influence on the SF audience.

Sincerely yours,

Arthur Engh
Levanger, Norway

The trouble with movie reviews is that it takes several months to get a review into the magazine. (That's how magazine publishing works; sorry.) By the time a book review gets in, the book is still around and can be bought by an eager reader. By the time a movie review gets in (the same time) the movie is gone and the eager viewer is frustrated. Of course, as you say, there are cassettes, but, then, too, SF movies are reviewed in many places; SF books are not.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editorial Staff,

I am guessing that there was some editorial input into the neat new mailing labels that come off

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the cover of my *Asimov's* without destroying the artwork. I seem to recall quite a bit of discussion on the subject that took place in your Letters column in years past. If the editors had anything to do with this, I must protest.

Yes, they really are neat, and it's nice to be able to read the cover, but this advantage is far outweighed by the fact that three out of five issues never arrive. In addition, your publishers no longer replace missing issues, as they have done for me a few times in the past, but simply "extend my subscription by one month to compensate for the missing issue." This is extremely vexing for me because, up until the last year, my collection of *Asimov's* is complete from volume 1, issue 1. Of course, Murphy's Law is operative, and though I really enjoyed (as far as I can tell) both of the two novels you've serialized, I have no idea how either of them ended, since those issues were among the missing. Another, more minor, flaw of these labels, is that since they get discarded from any issues that happen to arrive, there are no old labels lying around to send in on subscription correspondence.

If you people have anything to do with these labels, I hope that you'll consider changing them back to the same old sticky ones that obscured the cover art, but at least got the magazine delivered.

Todd O. Stevens
Lansing, MI

This is an example of how everything has its disadvantages. Put the labels on with an efficient glue and the artwork is ruined. Put on easy take-offs, and the gentle treatment at the post office destroys them. Either way, we get letters.

—Isaac Asimov

Dr. Asimov:

I greatly enjoyed your March 1987 editorial ("Intimations of Mortality") and found it quite intriguing. The brief history refresher was appreciated.

However, now that my memory is jogged, I must say that I disagree with two points, one major and one minor, that you so eloquently made in your essay.

The first maintained that if a previously well-established writer wished to keep his stature after a change in the direction of science fiction (e.g. from "Golden Age" to "New Wave"), he had to change his writing style accordingly and be successful doing so.

Of course, many writers do try to "change with the times." This, however, has led to varied success. Fritz Leiber was indeed one who managed to pull it off. Obviously, "Gonna Roll The Bones" is a very different story from "A Pail of Air," yet both are rightfully considered classics.

(An interesting exercise is to follow and contrast the stories in the "Fafhrd and The Grey Mouser" series as to the speculative fiction atmosphere in which they were written. The early stories were quite indicative of the "Golden Age," whereas the later ones like "Ill Met In Lankhmar" show marked experimental stylings. Was it a gradual or sudden change?)

Anyhow: Robert Heinlein, I think, is one who failed in his attempt to

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inject experimental stylings into his writing. His books of the seventies, like *Time Enough for Love,* while trying to be risqué and innovative, end up being merely unreadable. It is only recently, with his return to his Campbellesque form via books like *Friday* and *Job* that he has regained the Grand Master respect that he first gained in the forties.

But much more to the point, others did not even try to change. They were so adept at writing the way they did, that despite what literary currents may have been running at the time, their "old-style" books were still well received. Good examples would be Jack Williamson (still a great pulp writer!), and you, Dr. Asimov. You have said many (many!) times that you have never attempted to augment your "lovable" style, and I believe you. Except for technological details, *Robots and Empire* would have made perfect sense in 1955. And this despite the New Wave of the 60s, the hard scientists (Niven, Haldeman) of the 70s, and the current cyberpunks! An SF writer is never obligated to change his style, although it always remains a viable option.

The second point was that you do not consider the "New Wave" a success. But how does one consider success?

By influence? I would be willing to bet that most of the "postmoderns" so showcased in *IAsfm* cut their literary teeth on Moorcock, Ballard, and Dick.

By sales? *Dangerous Visions,* certainly a landmark New Wave anthology, is still the biggest selling collection in SF history. And while they are no longer operating, series such as *Universe, Quark,* and *Nova,* which gave so many New Wavers a forum, sold very well for their time.

By Hugos? Nebulas? Between them, Delany, Ellison, Farmer, and Silverberg (you can go ahead and add Ballard if you wish) have won half these writing awards. Your mock-jealousy at Mr. Ellison over this is in fact well documented.

Besides (if I may add a totally biased opinion), Robert Silverberg is the most important science fiction writer of all time. And he certainly is/was a new wave stylist.

Keep up the good work.

Sincerely,

Joshua L. Raisen
New York, NY

You're right. Many writers didn't try to change—but many writers faded away, too. You can't prove a thesis by Jack Williamson and myself. We're the exceptions, and don't ask me why. As for the New Wave: They were a failure by their own standards. They were going to wipe out the Old Wave and they didn't. Surely they had influence. Everything has an influence. But they simply didn't take over the field as they said they would.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Isaac,

A small addendum to your March editorial. Probably Chesley Bonestell never did any interior illustrations for science fiction stories, but he did do some covers.

About 1965, he and his wife were living in Berkeley, a short distance from my place. When John Campbell learned this, he urged that we

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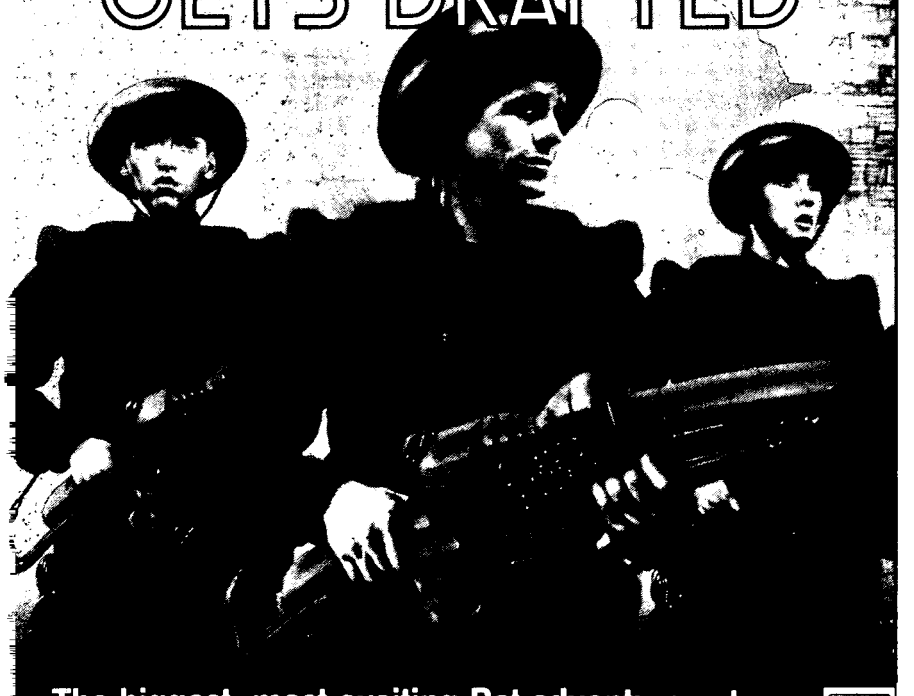

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get together, and started providing ideas for pieces that I would write and Bonestell paint. There came to be four of these—*The Ancient Gods* (now *World Without Stars*), "Supernova" (now "Day of Burning"), "Starfog," and *Satan's World*. Association with this artist was a high honor for me, and also a grand experience.

Best,

Poul Anderson
Orinda, CA

Thanks, Poul. I was misguided by my sources.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Dozois:

As a graduate student at work on a Ph.D. in American Literature and an instructor of Freshman English at Duke University, and also as an alumnus of a graduate-school creative writing program, I suppose I should be offended all the way around by Kevin C. Cole's letter in the February 1987 *Asimov's*. And in a way I am, although I really shouldn't be offended by someone so obviously unfamiliar with the very subject he attacks —anyone who truly believes that most contemporary American short story writers are disciples of Raymond Carver can't have read very many contemporary American short stories, by Carver or anyone else.

More importantly, though, as both an inhabitant of academe and a longtime SF reader, I resent Cole's letter as yet another example of the kind of narrow-minded academic-bashing which all too often makes it impossible for anyone who is not part of the science fiction community take to it seriously. The fact of the matter is that there has been a not-so-quiet revolution taking place in English academics over the past decade, one that takes on many guises and labels (Marxism, feminism, post-structuralism, historicism, you-name-it-ism), all of which come to the same conclusion: the traditional formalist, "high literary" approach to fiction—that is, the approach that has consistently dismissed SF as not worth noticing—is no longer adequate to describe with any real validity or usefulness what literature is and how it can/should be interpreted, evaluated, and used. In short, academia is coming up with theoretical bases for something we SF readers knew all along: namely, that traditional mainstream "literary" values aren't the only way to go, and that the novels of Theodore Sturgeon or Philip K. Dick are just a whole hell of a lot more interesting and vital than the novels of Saul Bellow or John Updike. We had long ago praised the former and expressed our suspicions of the latter, and we should be proud of that.

But it will all go for naught if we fall prey to the same kind of close-mindedness which has traditionally stunted academia. The "literary" virtues Cole berates John Kessel for admiring may not be the *only* virtues, but they are virtues nonetheless. Bellow and Updike may have extreme limitations, but they have something to teach us, as we have much to teach them. It would be tragic to close ourselves off to broadening influences from any source.

In the seminar I'm teaching this

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semester—The American Short Story—my students are reading Hemingway and Faulkner and Fitzgerald, and Raymond Carver and Bobbie Ann Mason and Jayne Anne Phillips (the latter of whose influence, by way of proving my point, shows up clearly in the work of William Gibson). They're also reading Harlan Ellison and Isaac Asimov and Theodore Sturgeon and Michael Bishop. Which is just as it should be.

For some time, SF fans have been wondering when academia would catch up with them. I can only hope that Mr. Cole and other SF fans will soon be able to catch up with academia.

Sincerely,

F. Brett Cox
Durham, NC

PS: As for Dr. Asimov's reply to Mr. Cole's letter, I can only shake my head in sorrow, remind myself that even Jove nods, and wonder how Joseph Patrouch and James Gunn—both of whom have written valuable books on Dr. Asimov's science fiction—feel to be "handicapped."

Let me point out that Gunn's book had an introduction by some colleague, which I found highly offensive. The kind of attention we get from academics who may feel that science fiction is the new path to publications and promotion is not necessarily what science fiction writers want. If academics are going to approach us with raised pinkies and the back of their left hand to their forehead, I'll be glad to have them go back to poetry.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. A., Gardner, and Sheila,

You've probably heard this a thousand times before, but after reading your March, 1987 issue, I felt compelled to write you and tell you what an outstanding job you are doing. The issue was just the latest example of quality fiction that has graced the insides of your magazine over the last nine years.

As an aging computer professional, I'm forced to read volumes of technical material to stay competitive in an ever changing industry. It's with great relief that I can turn to the pages of *Asimov's* and be guaranteed a relaxing and entertaining read. I can't tell you how much it means to me.

Keep up the great work!

Michael J. Parker
Houston, TX

We'll keep up the great work, never fear. As for you, spread the good word. Tell others how much you enjoy the magazine and encourage them to read it, too.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I read and enjoy your magazine regularly. However, your response to Cliff Dunbar in the Letters section (February 1987) was a bit weak. Mr. Dunbar wrote concerning James Tiptree, Jr.'s, excellent piece using principles from "linguistics" in developing a first contact conversation with an alien. Mr. Dunbar pointed out how accurate Mr. Tiptree's account was based on current knowledge from linguistics and that he hoped to see these principles applied more widely in future science fiction writing.

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You say, "But think how few people understand linguistics or have any instinctive feel for it. For myself, I'm likely to cop out by saying 'He talked with a horrible Comporellian accent'."

Prior to the "Letters" Section, you had written an Editorial on "Intellectual Clichés" (by the way, isn't that a repeat from somewhere—seems to me I have read that, or the majority of it, before). One of your major points was writers who will not expend the time and effort to acquire the background knowledge necessary to understand that the speed of light is fixed, or the laws of thermodynamics, or aspects of the Special Theory of Relativity. Yet you indicate to Mr. Dunbar that it is too much trouble to learn the basis for linguistics in order to have a first contact and the subsequent "pidgin" that develops follow (or at least not violate) known principles. Isn't the separation of science fiction and fantasy based on this very point —fantasy is not required to hold to laws and principles that are known, or at least possible extensions of these laws and principles. If a writer is to hold to that basic definition of SF, shouldn't he/she apply the same principles to other areas that relate to her/his writing? To quote you (p. 4) on relativistic mathematics, "If the challengers want to take the trouble to learn about it, they will see that for themselves—but this they never want to do, because, of course, it means a degree of intellectual strain."

I am neither a biochemist (as you are) nor linguist (as is Mr. Dunbar), just a university professor in the behavior sciences. But it seems to me that a good science fiction writer (or any other writer) learns whatever is necessary to enhance his or her writing. Certainly linguistics can be no more difficult than the Special Theory of Relativity. If a principle is to apply rigorously (as you insist it should in your editorial), then it applies to all areas.

In spite of my criticism on this point, you are my favorite writer (science fiction or otherwise) and I continue to enjoy your magazine and books.

Jerry R. Thomas
Professor of Physical
Education and Psychology
Louisiana State University

As in everything else, dear professor, you can ruin any thesis by deliberately taking it to ridiculous lengths. For a writer to learn about everything *is impractical. If one writes science fiction, knowing about science cannot be avoided, for ignorance will destroy the very backbone of the story. Linguistics is a tangential matter. No reader is going to demand an authentic Comporellian accent with the same fervor that they will denounce me for ignoring the second law of thermodynamics.*

—Isaac Asimov

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GAMING

by Matthew J. Costello

Years ago, before the days of children and a mortgage, when leisure time was something more than a distant memory, I discovered miniatures.

Yes, while stranded on Old Cape Cod during one of its wettest weeks, with naught to do but go watch the taffy machine in Provincetown, I picked up a set of lead miniatures complete with tiny paint cups and brush.

These miniatures, an old Grenadier set designed for use with *Dungeons & Dragons,* depicted a warrior, a wizard, and, I think, a scaly beast or two. While very useful for "gaming out" certain role-playing situations—where players say "Where am I standing? And just where *is* the pit filled with alligators?"—many people painted the miniatures "just for fun."

Which blew my mind.

I mean, here were these minuscule, two to three centimeter figures, with detailed features like eyes and belt buckles, to be *painted.* And having seen some of the painted figures displayed at the Compleat Strategist game stores in New York City, I was in awe. And a little scared. After all, who'd have the perseverance to create such tiny masterpieces? Was it safe to have them on the street?

So, I brought my set back to the beach house—so named, surely, for the amount of sand that covers the floor and the knotty pine furniture. I painted my first figure, a lizard man, holding a spear. The simple instructions gave me helpful suggestions, like telling me to glue the figure to some cardboard (so I didn't have to handle it when it was wet) and applying a wash—a thin, diluted coat of white paint that makes the painted surface more tractable. There are also instructions for highlighting the figure by a dry-brush technique and then using a darker wash, when the figure was completed, to bring out details.

And I loved it. It was, as they say at the Arkham House for the Permanently Insane, therapeutic. Though one's eyeballs tended to knock together, working at such close range, it was amazing how incredibly small details can be painted. Soon my wife became interested and turned out some crackerjack figures, including a nifty warrior mounted on a spider . . . and we had a nice little hobby.

Till the kids arrived.

I won't trouble you with the familiar saga of the wonderful effect children have on what one used to call "free time." Needless to say,

(Continued on page 183)

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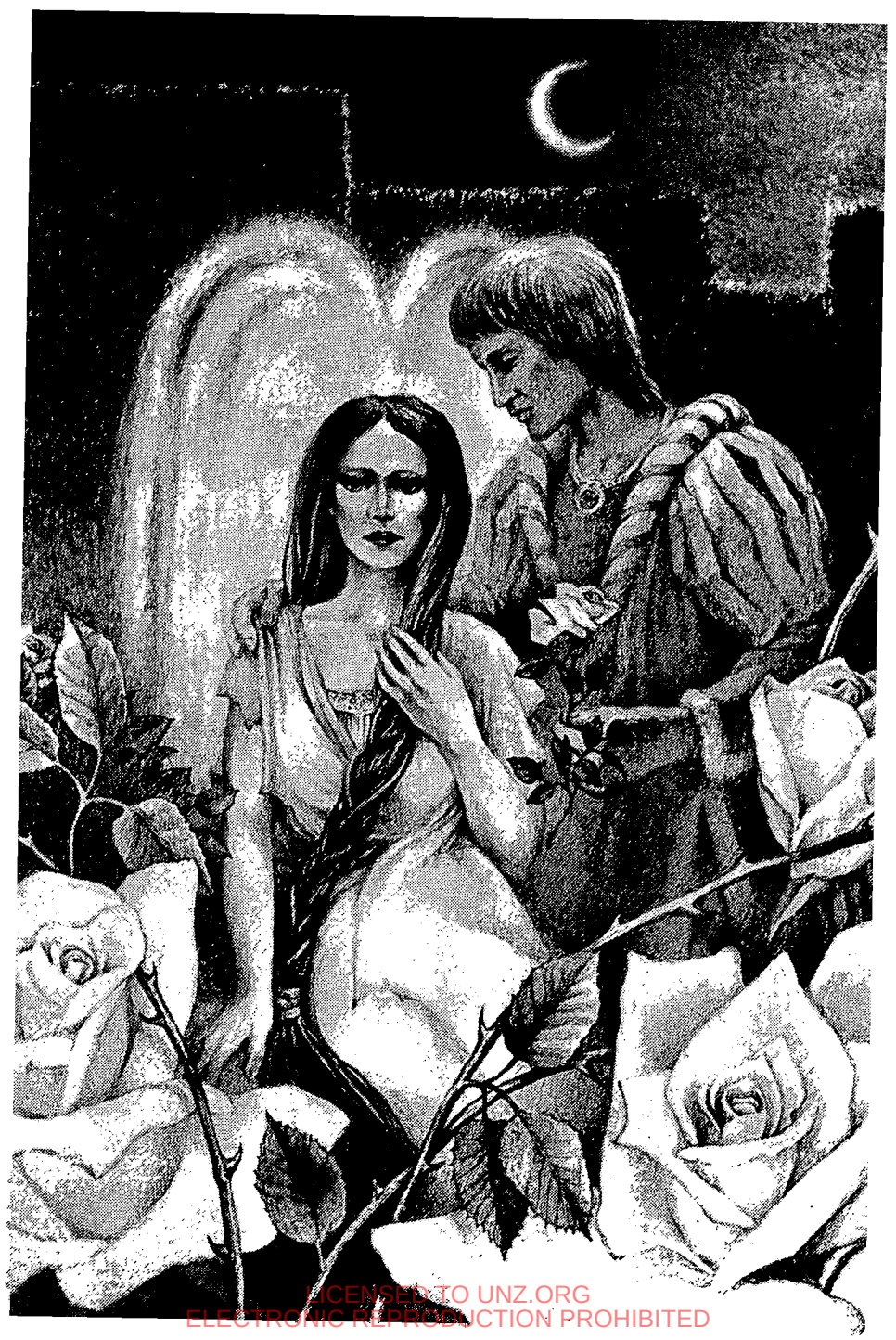

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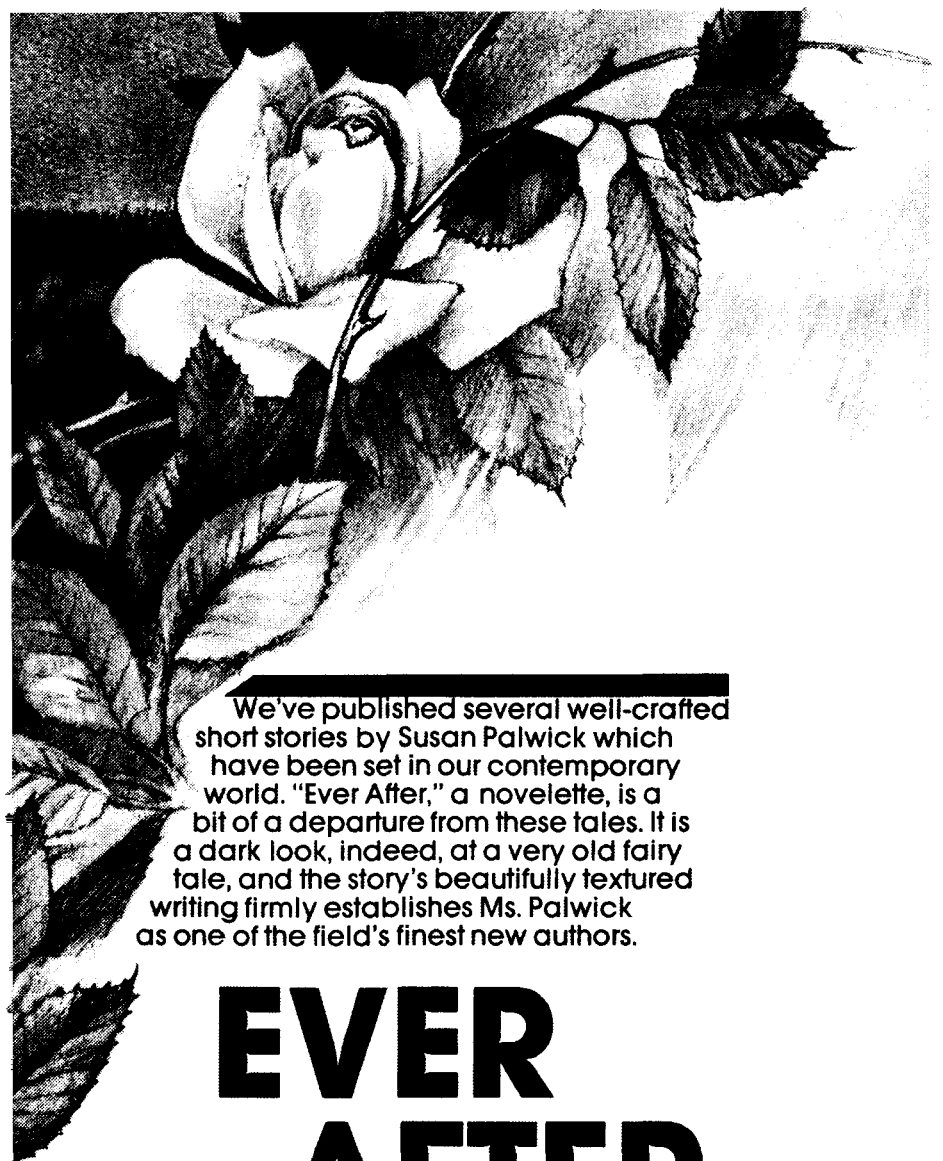

We've published several well-crafted short stories by Susan Palwick which have been set in our contemporary world. "Ever After," a novelette, is a bit of a departure from these tales. It is a dark look, indeed, at a very old fairy tale, and the story's beautifully textured writing firmly establishes Ms. Palwick as one of the field's finest new authors.

EVER AFTER

by Susan Palwick

art: Linda Burr

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"Velvet," she says, pushing back her sleep-tousled hair. "I want green velvet this time, with lace around the neck and wrists. Cream lace—not white—and sea-green velvet. Can you do that?"

"Of course." She's getting vain, this one; vain and a little bossy. The wonder has worn off. All for the best. Soon now, very soon, I'll have to tell her the truth.

She bends, here in the dark kitchen, to peer at the back of her mother's prized copper kettle. It's just after dusk, and by the light of the lantern I'm holding a vague reflection flickers and dances on the metal. She scowls. "Can't you get me a real mirror? That ought to be simple enough."

I remember when the light I brought filled her with awe. Wasting good fuel, just to see yourself by! "No mirrors. I clothe you only in seeming, not in fact. You know that."

"Ah." She waves a hand, airily. She's proud of her hands: delicate and pale and long-fingered, a noblewoman's hands; all the years before I came she protected them against the harsh work of her mother's kitchen. "Yes, the prince. I have to marry a prince, so I can have his jewels for my own. Will it be this time, do you think?"

"There will be no princes at this dance, Caitlin. You are practicing for princes."

"Hah! And when I'm good enough at last, will you let me wear glass slippers?"

"Nonsense. You might break them during a gavotte, and cut yourself." She knew the story before I found her; they always do. It enters their blood as soon as they can follow speech, and lodges in their hearts like the promise of spring. All poor mothers tell their daughters this story, as they sit together in dark kitchens, scrubbing pots and trying to save their hands for the day when the tale becomes real. I often wonder if that first young woman was one of ours, but the facts don't matter. Like all good stories, this one is true.

"Princess Caitlin," she says dreamily. "That will be very fine. Oh, how they will envy me! It's begun already, in just the little time since you've made me beautiful. Ugly old Lady Alison—did you see her giving me the evil eye, at the last ball? Just because my skin is smooth and hers wrinkled, and I a newcomer?"

"Yes," I tell her. I am wary of Lady Alison, who looks too hard and says too little. Lady Alison is dangerous.

"Jealousy," Caitlin says complacently. "I'd be jealous, if I looked like she does."

"You are very lovely," I say, and it is true. With her blue eyes and raven hair, and those hands, she could have caught the eye of many princes on her own. Except, of course, that without me they never would have seen her.

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Laughing, she sits to let me plait her hair. "So serious! You never smile at me. Do magic folks never smile? Aren't you proud of me?"

"Very proud," I say, parting the thick cascade and beginning to braid it. She smells like smoke and the thin, sour stew which simmers on the hearth, but at the dance tonight she will be scented with all the flowers of summer.

"Will you smile and laugh when I have my jewels and land? I shall give you riches, then."

So soon, I think, and my breath catches. So soon she offers me gifts, and forgets the woman who bore her, who now lies snoring in the other room. All for the best; and yet I am visited by something very like pity. "No wife has riches but from her lord, Caitlin. Not in this kingdom."

"I shall have riches of my own, when I am married," she says grandly; and then, her face clouding as if she regrets having forgotten, "My mother will be rich too, then. She'll like you, when we're rich. Godmother, why doesn't she like you now?"

"Because I am stealing you away from her. She has never been invited to a ball. And because I am beautiful, and she isn't any more."

What I have said is true enough, as always; and, as always, I find myself wondering if there is more than that. No matter. If Caitlin's mother suspects, she says nothing. I am the only chance she and her daughter have to approach nobility, and for the sake of that dream she has tolerated my presence, and Caitlin's odd new moods, and the schedule which keeps the girl away from work to keep her fresh for dances.

Caitlin bends her head, and the shining braids slip through my fingers like water. "She'll come to the castle whenever she wants to, when I'm married to a prince. We'll make her beautiful too, then. I'll buy her clothing and paint for her face."

"There are years of toil on her, Caitlin. Lady Alison is your mother's age, and all her riches can't make her lovely again."

"Oh, but Lady Alison's mean. That makes you ugly." Caitlin dismisses her enemy with the ignorance of youth. Lady Alison is no meaner than anyone, but she has borne illnesses and childlessness and the unfaithfulness of her rich lord. Her young nephew will fall in love with Caitlin tonight—a match Lord Gregory suggested, I suspect, precisely because Alison will oppose it.

Caitlin's hair is done, piled in coiled, lustrous plaits. "Do you have the invitation? Where did I put it?"

"On the table, next to the onions."

She nods, crosses the room, snatches up the thick piece of paper and fans herself with it. I remember her first invitation, only six dances ago, her eagerness and innocence and purity, the wide eyes and wonder. *I? I have been invited to the ball?* She refused to let go of the invitation

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then; afraid it might vanish as suddenly as it had come, she carried it with her for hours. They are always at their most beautiful that first time, when they believe most fully in the story and are most awe-stricken at having been chosen to play the heroine. No glamour we give them can ever match that first glow.

"Clothe me," Caitlin commands now, standing with her eyes closed in the middle of the kitchen, and I put the glamour on her and her grubby kitchen-gown is transformed by desire and shadow into sea-green velvet and cream lace. She smiles. She opens her eyes, which gleam with joy and the giddiness of transformation. She has taken easily to that rush; she craves it. Already she has forsaken dreams of love for dreams of power.

"I'm hungry," she says. "I want to eat before the dance. What was that soup you gave me last night? You must have put wine in it, because it made me drunk. I want more of that."

"No food before you dance," I tell her. "You don't want to look fat, do you?"

No chance of that, for this girl who has starved in a meager kitchen all her life; but at the thought of dancing she forgets her hunger and takes a few light steps in anticipation of the music. "Let me stay longer this time—please. Just an hour or two. I never get tired any more."

"Midnight," I tell her flatly. It won't do to change that part of the story until she knows everything.

So we go to the dance, in a battered carriage made resplendent not by any glamour of mine but by Caitlin's belief in her own beauty. This, too, she has learned easily; already the spells are more hers than mine, although she doesn't yet realize it.

At the gates, Caitlin hands the invitation to the footman. She has grown to relish this moment, the thrill of bending him to her will with a piece of paper, of forcing him to admit someone he suspects—quite rightly—doesn't belong here. It is very important that she learn to play this game. Later she will learn to win her own invitations, to cajole the powerful into admitting her where, without their permission, she cannot go at all.

Only tonight it is less simple. The footman glances at the envelope, frowns, says, "I'm sorry, but I can't admit you."

"Can't admit us?" Caitlin summons the proper frosty indignation, and so I let her keep talking. She needs to learn this, too. "Can't admit us, with a handwritten note from Lord Gregory?"

"Just so, mistress. Lady Alison has instructed—"

"Lady Alison didn't issue the invitation."

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The footman coughs, shuffles his feet. "Just so. I have the very strictest instructions—"

"What does Lord Gregory instruct?"

"Lord Gregory has not—"

"Lord Gregory wrote the invitation. Lord Gregory wants us here. If Lord Gregory learned we were denied it would go badly for you, footman."

He looks up at us; he looks miserable. "Just so," he says, sounding wretched.

"I shall speak to her for you," I tell him, and Caitlin smiles at me and we are through the gates, passing ornate gardens and high, neat hedges. I lean back in my seat, shaking. Lady Alison is very dangerous, but she has made a blunder. The servant could not possibly refuse her husband's invitation; all she has done is to warn us. "Be very careful tonight," I say to Caitlin. "Avoid her."

"I'd like to scratch her eyes out! How dare she, that jealous old—"

"Avoid her, Caitlin! I'll deal with her. I don't want to see you anywhere near her."

She subsides. Already we can hear music from the great hall, and her eyes brighten as she taps time to the beat.

The people at the dance are the ones who are always at dances; by now, all of them know her. She excites the men and unnerves the women, and where she passes she leaves a trail of uncomfortable silence, followed by hushed whispers. I strain to hear what they are saying, but catch only the usual comments about her youth, her beauty, her low birth.

"Is she someone's illegitimate child, do you think?"

"A concubine, surely."

"She'll never enter a convent, not that one."

"Scheming husband-hunter, and may she find one soon. I don't want her taking mine."

The usual. I catch sight of Lady Alison sitting across the wide room. She studies us with narrowed eyes. One arthritic hand, covered with jeweled rings, taps purposefully on her knee. She sees me watching her and meets my gaze without flinching. She crosses herself.

I look away, wishing we hadn't come here. What does she intend to do? I wonder how much she has learned simply by observation, and how much Gregory let slip. I scan the room again and spot him, in a corner, nursing a chalice of wine. He is watching Caitlin as intently as his wife did, but with a different expression.

And someone else is watching Caitlin, among the many people who glance at her and then warily away: Randolph, Gregory's young nephew, who is tall and well-formed and pleasant of face. Caitlin looks to me for confirmation and I nod. She smiles at Randolph—that artful smile there

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has never been need to teach—and he extends a hand to invite her to dance.

I watch them for a moment, studying how she looks up at him, the angle of her head, the flutter of her lashes. She started with the smile, and I gave her the rest. She has learned her skills well.

"So," someone says behind me, "she's growing accustomed to these late nights."

I turn. Lady Alison stands there, unlovely and shrunken, having crossed the room with improbable speed. "Almost as used to them as you," she says.

I bow my head, carefully acquiescent. "Or you yourself. Those who would dance in these halls must learn to do without sleep."

"Some sleep during the day." Her mouth twitches. "I am Randolph's aunt, mistress. While he stays within these walls his care lies in my keeping, even as the care of the girl lies in yours. I will safeguard him however I must."

I laugh, the throaty chuckle which thrills Gregory, but my amusement is as much an act as Caitlin's flirtatiousness. "Against dancing with pretty young women?"

"Against being alone with those who would entrap him with his own ignorance. He knows much too little of the world; he places more faith in fairy tales than in history, and neither I nor the Church have been able to persuade him to believe in evil. I pray you, by our Lord in heaven and his holy saints, leave this house."

"So you requested at the gates." Her piety nauseates me, as she no doubt intended, and I keep my voice steady only with some effort. "The Lord of this castle is Lord Gregory, Lady Alison, by whose invitation we are here and in whose hospitality we will remain."

She grimaces. "I have some small power of my own, although it does not extend to choosing my guests. Pray chaperone your charge."

"No need. They are only dancing." I glance at Caitlin and Randolph, who gaze at each other as raptly as if no one else were in the room. Randolph's face is silly and soft; Caitlin's, when I catch a glimpse of it, is soft and ardent. I frown, suddenly uneasy; that look is a bit too sudden and far too unguarded, and may be more than artifice.

Lady Alison snorts. "Both will want more than dancing presently, I warrant, although they will want different things. Chaperone her—or I will do it for you, less kindly."

With that she turns and vanishes into the crowd. I turn back to the young couple, thinking that a chaperone would indeed be wise tonight; but the players have struck up a minuet, and Caitlin and Randolph glide gracefully through steps as intricate and measured as any court intrigue. The dance itself will keep them safe, for a little while.

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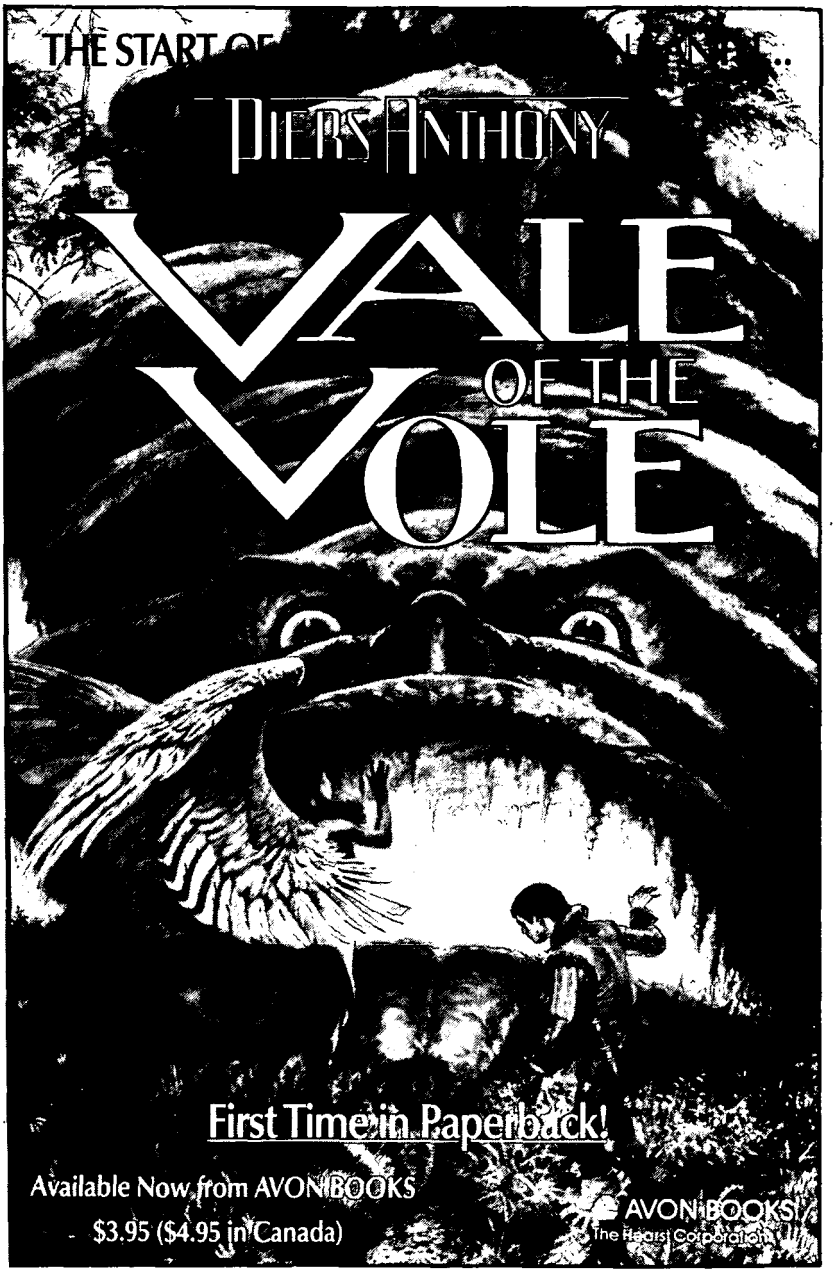

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Instead I make my way to Gregory, slowly, drifting around knots of people as if I am only surveying the crowd. Alison has positioned herself to watch Caitlin and Randolph, who dip and twirl through the steps of the dance; I hope she won't notice me talking to her husband.

"She is very beautiful," says Gregory softly when I reach his side. "Even lovelier than you, my dear. What a charming couple they make. I would give much to be Randolph, for a few measures of this dance."

He thinks he can make me jealous. Were this any other ball I might pretend he had succeeded, but I have no time for games tonight. "Gregory, Alison tried to have us barred at the gate. And she just threatened me."

He smiles. "That was foolish of her. Also futile."

"Granted," I say, although I suspect Lady Alison has resources of which neither of us are aware. Most wives of the nobility do: faithful servants, devoted priests, networks of spies in kitchens and corridors.

Gregory reaches out to touch my cheek; I draw away from him, uneasy. Everyone here suspects I am his mistress, but there is little sense in giving them public proof. He laughs gently. "You need not be afraid of her. She loves the boy and wishes only to keep him cloistered in a chapel, with his head buried in scripture. I tell her that is no sport for a young man and certainly no education for a titled lord, who must learn how to resist the blandishments of far more experienced women. So he and our little Caitlin will be merry, and take their lessons from each other, with no one the worse for it. See how they dance together!"

They dance as I have taught Caitlin she should dance with princes: lingering over the steps, fingertips touching, lips parted and eyes bright. Alison watches them, looking worried, and I cannot help but feel the same way. Caitlin is too obvious, too oblivious; she has grown innocent again, in a mere hour. I remember what Alison said about history, and fairy tales; if Caitlin and Randolph both believe themselves in that same old story, things will go harshly for all of us.

"Let them be happy together," Gregory says softly. "They have need of happiness, both of them—Randolph with his father surely dying, and the complexities of power about to bewilder him, and Caitlin soon to learn her true nature. You cannot keep it from her much longer, Juliana. She has changed too much. Let them be happy, for this one night; and let their elders, for once, abandon care and profit from their example."

He reaches for my hand again, drawing me closer to him, refusing to let go. His eyes are as bright as Randolph's; he has had rather too much wine. "Profit from recklessness?" I ask, wrenching my fingers from his fist. Alison has looked away from her nephew and watches us now, expressionless. I hear murmurs around us; a young courtier in purple satin and green hose raises an eyebrow.

"This is my castle," Gregory says. "My halls and land, my musicians,

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my servants and clerics and nobles; my wife. No one can hurt you here, Juliana."

"No one save you, my lord. Kindly retain your good sense—"

"My invitation." His voice holds little kindness now. "My invitation allowed you entrance, as it has many other times; I provide you with splendor, and fine nourishment, and a training ground for the girl, and I am glad to do so. I am no slave of Alison's priests, Juliana; I know full well that you are not evil."

"Kindly be more quiet and discreet, my lord!" The courtier is carefully ignoring us now, evidently fascinated with a bunch of grapes. Caitlin and Randolph, transfixed by each other, sway in the last steps of the minuet.

Gregory continues in the same tone, "Of late you have paid far more attention to Caitlin than to me. Even noblemen are human, and can be hurt. Let the young have their pleasures tonight, and let me have mine."

I lower my own voice, since he refuses to lower his. "What, in the middle of the ballroom? That would be a fine entertainment for your guests! I will come to you tomorrow—"

"Tonight," he says, into the sudden silence of the dance's end. "Come to me tonight, in the usual chamber—"

"It is a poor lord who leaves his guests untended," I tell him sharply, "and a poor teacher who abandons her student. You will excuse me."

He reaches for me again, but I slip past his hands and go to find Caitlin, wending my way around gaudily-dressed lords and ladies and squires, catching snippets of gossip and conversation.

"Did you see them dancing—"

"So the venison disagreed with me, but thank goodness it was only a trifling ailment—"

"Penelope's violet silk! I said, my dear, I simply must have the pattern and wherever did you find that seamstress—"

"Gregory's brother in failing health, and the young heir staying here? No uncle can be trusted that far. The boy had best have a quick dagger and watch his back, is what I say."

That comment hurries my steps. Gregory's brother is an obscure duke, but he is a duke nonetheless, and Gregory is next in the line of succession after Randolph. If Randolph is in danger, and Caitlin with him—

I have been a fool. We should not have come here, and we must leave. I scan the colorful crowd more anxiously than ever for Caitlin, but my fears are groundless; she has found me first, and rushes towards me, radiant. "Oh, godmother—"

"Caitlin! My dear, listen: you must stay by me—"

But she hasn't heard me. "Godmother, he's so sweet and kind, so sad with his father ill and yet trying to be merry—did you see how he danced?

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Why does it have to be a prince I love? I don't care if he's not a prince, truly I don't, and just five days ago I scorned that other gawky fellow for not having a title, but he wasn't nearly as nice—"

"Caitlin!" Yes, we most assuredly must leave. I lower my voice and take her by the elbow. "Listen to me: many men are nice. If you want a nice man you may marry a blacksmith. I am not training you to be a mere duchess."

She grows haughty now. "Duchess sounds quite well enough to me. Lord Gregory is no king."

Were we in private I would slap her for that. "No, he isn't, but he is a grown man and come into his limited power, and so he is still more useful to us than Randolph. Caitlin, we must leave now—"

"No! We can't leave; it's nowhere near midnight. I don't want to leave. You can't make me."

"I can strip you of your finery right here."

"Randolph wouldn't care."

"Everyone else would, and he is outnumbered."

"Randolph picks his own companions—"

"Randolph," I say, losing all patience, "still picks his pimples. He is a fine young man, Caitlin, but he is young nonetheless. My dear, many more things are happening here tonight than your little romance. I am your magic godmother, and on some subjects you must trust me. We are leaving."

"I won't leave," she says, raising her chin. "I'll stay here until after midnight. I don't care if you turn me into a toad; Randolph will save me, and make me a duchess."

"Princesses are safer," I tell her grimly, not at all sure it's even true. On the far side of the room I see the courtier in the green hose talking intently to Lady Alison, and a chill cuts through me. Well, he cannot have heard much which isn't general rumor, and soon we will be in the carriage, and away from all this.

"Caitlin!" Randolph hurries up to us, as welcoming and guileless as some friendly dog. "Why did you leave me? I didn't know where you'd gone. Will you dance with me again? Here, some wine if you don't mind sharing, I thought you'd be thirsty—"

She takes the goblet and sips, laughing. "Of course I'll dance with you."

I frown at Caitlin and clear my throat. "I regret that she cannot, my lord—"

"This is my godmother Juliana," Caitlin cuts in, taking another sip of wine and giving Randolph a dazzling smile, "who worries overmuch about propriety and thinks people will gossip if I dance with you too often."

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ROBERT ADAMS

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They had named him Grand *Strahteegos* of Southern Ehleenohee for life, knowing he would keep the kingdom safe until Milo and the Horseclansmen succeeded in conquering the barbarians. But no one had foreseen that an insidious madness would transform Grand *Strahteegos* into an enemy far more dangerous than any invader. Time was fast running out for Milo to save this new Confederation kingdom, driven to the brink of civil war by a madman's cruel decrees...

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"And so they shall," he says, bowing and kissing my hand, "because everyone gossips about beauty." He straightens and smiles down at me, still holding my hand. His cheeks are flushed and his fingers very warm; I can feel the faint, steady throb of his pulse against my skin. What could Caitlin do but melt, in such heat?

"Randolph!" Two voices, one cry; Alison and Gregory approach us from opposite directions, the sea of guests parting before them.

Alison, breathless, reaches us a moment before her husband does. "Randolph, my love—the players are going to give us another slow tune, at my request. You'll dance with your crippled old aunt, won't you?"

He bows; he can hardly refuse her. Gregory, standing next to Caitlin, says smoothly, "And I will have the honor of dancing with the young lady, with her kind godmother's assent."

It isn't a petition. I briefly consider feigning illness, but such a ruse would shake Caitlin's faith in my power and give Gregory the excuse to protest that I must stay here, spend the night and be made comfortable in his household's care.

Instead I station myself next to a pillar to watch the dancers. Alison's lips move as Randolph guides her carefully around the floor. I see her press a small pouch into his hand; he smiles indulgently and puts it in a pocket.

She is warning him away from Caitlin, then. This dance is maddeningly slow, and far too long; I crane my neck to find Caitlin and Gregory, only to realize that they are about to sweep past me. "Yes, I prefer roses to all other blooms," Caitlin says lightly. (That too is artifice; she preferred forget-me-nots until I taught her otherwise.)

So at least one of these conversations is insignificant, and Caitlin safe. Alison and Randolph, meanwhile, glare at each other; she is trying to give him something on a chain, and he is refusing it. They pass me, but say nothing; Caitlin and Gregory go by again a moment later. "Left left right, left left right," he tells her, before they are past my hearing, "it is a pleasing pattern and very fashionable; you must try it."

A new court dance, no doubt. This old one ends at last and I dart for Caitlin, only to be halted by a group of rowdy acrobats who have just burst into the hall. "Your pleasure!" they cry, doing flips and twists in front of me as the crowd laughs and gathers to watch them. "Your entertainment, your dancing hearts!" I try to go around them, but find myself blocked by a motley-clad clown juggling pewter goblets. "Hey! We'll make you merry, at the generous lord's invitation we'll woo you, we'll win you—"

You'll distract us, I think—but from what? I manage to circle the juggler, but there is no sign of Caitlin or Randolph. Gregory seems likewise to have disappeared.

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Alison is all too evident, however. "Where are they? What have you done with them?" She stands in front of me, her hands clenched on the fine silk of her skirt. "I turned away from Randolph for a mere moment to answer a servant's question, and when I looked back he was gone—"

"My lady, I was standing on the side. You no doubt saw me. I am honestly eager to honor your wishes and be gone, and I dislike this confusion as much as you do."

"I know you," she says, trembling, her voice very low. "I know you for what you are. I told Randolph but he would not believe me, and Gregory fairly revels in dissolution. I would unmask you in this hall and send town criers to spread the truth about you, save that my good lord would be set upon by decent Christian folk were it known he had trafficked with such a creature."

And your household destroyed and all your riches plundered, I think; yes, the poor welcome such pretexts. You do well to maintain silence, Alison, since it buys your own safety.

But I dare not admit to what she knows. "I am but a woman as yourself, my lady, and I share your concern for Randolph and the girl—"

"Nonsense. They are both charming young people who dance superbly." Gregory has reappeared, affable and urbane; he seems more relaxed than he has all evening, and I trust him less.

So does Alison, by the look of her. "And where have you hidden our two paragons of sprightliness, my lord?"

"I? I have not hidden them anywhere. Doubtless they have stolen away and found some quiet corner to themselves. The young will do such things. Alison, my sweet, you look fatigued—"

"And the old, when they get a chance. No: I am not going to retire conveniently and leave you alone with this creature. I value your soul far more than that."

"Although not my body," Gregory says, raising an eyebrow. "Well, then, shall we dance, all three? With linked hands in a circle, like children? Shall we sit and discuss the crops, or have a hand of cards? What would you, my lovelies?"

Alison takes his hand. "Let us go find our nephew."

He sighs heavily and rolls his eyes, but he allows himself to be led away. I am glad to be rid of them; now I can search on my own and make a hasty exit. The conversation with Alison worries me. She is too cautious to destroy us here, but she may well try to have us followed into the countryside.

So I make my way through corridors, through courtyards, peering into corners and behind pillars, climbing winding staircases and descending them, until I am lost and can no longer hear the music from the great hall. I meet other furtive lovers, dim shapes embracing in shadows, but

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none are Randolph and Caitlin. When I have exhausted every passageway I can find I remember Caitlin and Gregory's discussion of roses and hurry outside, through a doorway I have never seen before, but the moonlit gardens yield nothing. The sky tells me that it is midnight: Caitlin will be rejoicing at having eluded me.

Wherever she is. These halls and grounds are too vast; I could wander all night and still not find her by dawn. Gregory knows where she is: I am convinced he does, convinced he arranged the couple's disappearance. He may have done so to force me into keeping the tryst with him. That would be very like him; he would be thrilled by my seeking him out while his guests gossip and dance in the great hall. Gregory delights in private indiscretions at public events.

So I will play his game this once, although it angers me, and lie with him, and be artful and cajoling. I go back inside and follow hallways I know to Gregory's chambers, glancing behind me to be sure I am not seen.

The small chapel where Lady Alison takes her devotions lies along the same path, and as I pass it I hear moans of pain. I stop, listening, wary of a trap—but the noise comes again, and the agony sounds genuine: a thin, childish whimpering clearly made by a woman.

Caitlin? I remember Alison's threats, and my vision blackens for a moment. I slip into the room, hiding in shadows, tensed to leap. If Alison led the girl here—

Alison is indeed here, but Caitlin is not with her. Doubled over in front of the altar, Gregory's wife gasps for breath and clutches her side; her face is sweaty, gray, the pupils dilated. She sees me and recoils, making her habitual sign of the cross; her hand is trembling, but her voice remains steady. "So. Didn't you find them, either?"

"My lady Alison, what—"

"He called it a quick poison," she says, her face contorting with pain, "but I am stronger than he thinks, or the potion weaker. I was tired—my leg . . . we came here; it was close. I asked him to pray with me, and he repented very prettily. 'I will bring some wine,' he said, 'and we will both drink to my salvation.' Two cups he brought, and I took the one he gave me . . . I thought him saved, and relief dulled my wits. 'Mulled wine,' he said, 'I ground the spices for you myself,' and so he did, no doubt. Pray none other taste them."

So much speech has visibly drained her; shaken, I help her into a chair. What motive could Gregory have for killing his wife? Her powers of observation were an asset to him, though he rarely heeded them, and he couldn't have felt constrained by his marriage vows; he never honored them while she was alive.

"It is well I believe in the justice of God," she says. "No one will punish

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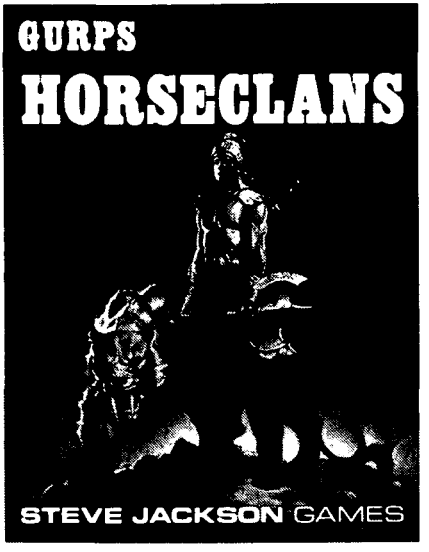

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him here in the world. They will pretend I ate bad meat, or had an attack of bile."

"Be silent and save your strength," I tell her, but she talks anyway, crying now, fumbling to wipe her face through spasms.

"He tired of me because I am old. He grew tired of a wife who said her prayers, and loved other people's children although she could have none of her own. No doubt he will install you by his side now, since you are made of darkness and steal the daughters of simple folk."

Gregory knows far better than to make me his formal consort, whatever Alison thinks. "We choose daughters only when one of us has been killed, Lady Alison. We wish no more than anyone does—to continue, and to be safe."

"I will continue in heaven," she says, and then cries out, a thin keening which whistles between her teeth. She no longer sounds human.

I kneel beside her, uncertain she will be able to understand my words. This does not look like a quick-acting potion, whatever Gregory said; it will possibly take her hours to die, and she will likely be mad before then. "I cannot save you, my lady, but I can make your end swift and painless."

"I need no mercy from such as you!"

"You must take mercy where you can get it. Who else will help you?"

She moans and then subsides, trembling. "I have not been shriven. He could have allowed me that."

"But he did not. Perhaps you will be called a saint someday, and this declared your martyrdom; for now, the only last rites you will be offered are mine."

She crosses herself again, but this time it is clearly an effort for her to lift her hand. "A true death?"

"A true death," I say gently. "We do not perpetuate pain."

Her lips draw back from her teeth. "Be merciful, then; and when you go to your assignation, tell Gregory he harms himself far worse than he has harmed me."

It is quick and painless, as I promised, but I am shaking when I finish, and the thought of seeing Gregory fills me with dread. I will have to pretend not to know that he has murdered his wife; I will have to be charming, and seductive, and disguise my concern for my own safety and Caitlin's so I can trick her whereabouts out of him.

I knock on his door and hear the soft "Enter." Even here I need an invitation, to enter this chamber where Gregory will be sprawled on the bed, peeling an apple or trimming his fingernails, his clothing already unfastened.

Tonight the room is unlit. I see someone sitting next to the window, silhouetted in moonlight; only as my eyes adjust to the dimness do I

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realize that Gregory has not kept our appointment. A priest waits in his place, surrounded by crucifixes and bottles of holy water and plaster statues of saints. On the bed where I have lain so often is something long and sharp which I force myself not to look at too closely.

"Hello," he says, as the door thuds shut behind me. I should have turned and run, but it is too late now; I have frozen at the sight of the priest, as they say animals do in unexpected light. In the hallway I hear heavy footsteps—the corridor is guarded, then.

The priest holds an open Bible; he glances down at it, and then, with a grimace of distaste, sideways at the bed. "No, lady, it won't come to that. You needn't look so frightened."

I say nothing. I tell myself I must think clearly, and be very quick, but I cannot think at all. We are warned about these small rooms, these implements. All the warnings I have heard have done me no good.

"There's the window," he explains. "You could get out that way if you had to. That is how I shall tell them you escaped, when they question me." He gestures at his cheek, and I see a thin, cruel scar running from forehead to jaw. "When I was still a child, my father took me poaching for boar on our lord's estate. It was my first hunt. It taught me not to corner frightened beasts, especially when they have young. Sit down, lady. Don't be afraid."

I sit, cautiously and without hope, and he closes the book with a soft sound of sighing parchment. "You are afraid, of course; well you should be. Lord Gregory has trapped you, for reasons he says involve piety but doubtless have more to do with politics; Lady Alison has been weaving her own schemes to destroy you, and the Church has declared you incapable of redemption. You have been quite unanimously consigned to the stake. Which is—" he smiles "—why I am here. Do you believe in God, my dear? Do your kind believe in miracles?"

When I don't answer he smiles again and goes on easily, as if we were chatting downstairs at the dance, "You should. It is a kind of miracle that has brought you to me. I have prayed for this since I was very young, and now I am old and my prayer has been answered. I was scarcely more than a boy when I entered the religious life, and for many years I was miserable, but now I see that this is why it happened."

He laughs, quite kindly. His kindness terrifies me. I fear he is mad. "I came from a poor family," he says. "I was the youngest son, and so, naturally, I became a priest. The Church cannot get sons the normal way, so it takes other people's and leaves the best young men to breed more souls. You and I are not, you see, so very different."

He leans back in his chair. "There were ten other children in my family. Four died. The littlest and weakest was my youngest sister, who was visited one day by a very beautiful woman who made her lovely, and

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took her to parties, and then took her away. I never got to say good-bye to my sister—her name was Sofia—and I never got to tell her that, although I knew what she had become, I still loved her. I thought she would be coming back, you see."

He leans forward earnestly, and his chair makes a scraping sound. "I have always prayed for a way to reach her. The Church tells me to destroy you, but I do not believe God wants you destroyed—because He has sent you to me, who thinks of you only with pity and gratitude and love. I am glad my little sister was made beautiful. If you know her, Sofia with green eyes and yellow hair, tell her Thomas loves her, eh? Tell her I am doubtless a heretic, for forgiving her what she is. Tell her I think of her every day when I take the Holy Communion. Will you do that for me?"

I stare at him, wondering if the watchers in the hallway can distinguish words through the thick wooden door.

He sighs. "So suspicious! Yes, of course you will. You will deliver my message, and I'll say you confounded me by magic and escaped through the window. Eh?"

"They'll kill you," I tell him. The calmness of my voice shocks me. I am angry now: not at Lord Gregory who betrayed me, not at Lady Alison, who was likewise betrayed and died believing me about to lie with her husband, but with this meandering holy man who prattles of miracles and ignores his own safety. "The ones set to guard the door. They'll say you must have been possessed by demons, to let me escape."

He nods and pats his book. "We will quite probably both be killed. Lady Alison means to set watchers on the roads."

So he doesn't know. "Lady Alison is dead. Gregory poisoned her."

He pales and bows his head for a moment. "Ah. It is certainly political, then, and no one is safe tonight. I have bought you only a very little time; you had best use it. Now go: gather your charge and flee, and God be with you both. I shall chant exorcisms and hold them off, eh? Go on: use the window."

I use the window. I dislike changing shape and do so only in moments of extreme danger; it requires too much energy, and the consequent hunger can make one reckless.

I have made myself an owl, not the normal choice but a good one; I need acute vision, and a form which won't arouse suspicion in alert watchers. From this height I can see the entire estate: the castle, the surrounding land, gardens and pathways and fountains—and something else I never knew about, and could not have recognized from the ground.

The high hedges lining the road to the castle form, in one section, the side of a maze, one of those ornate topiary follies which pass in and out

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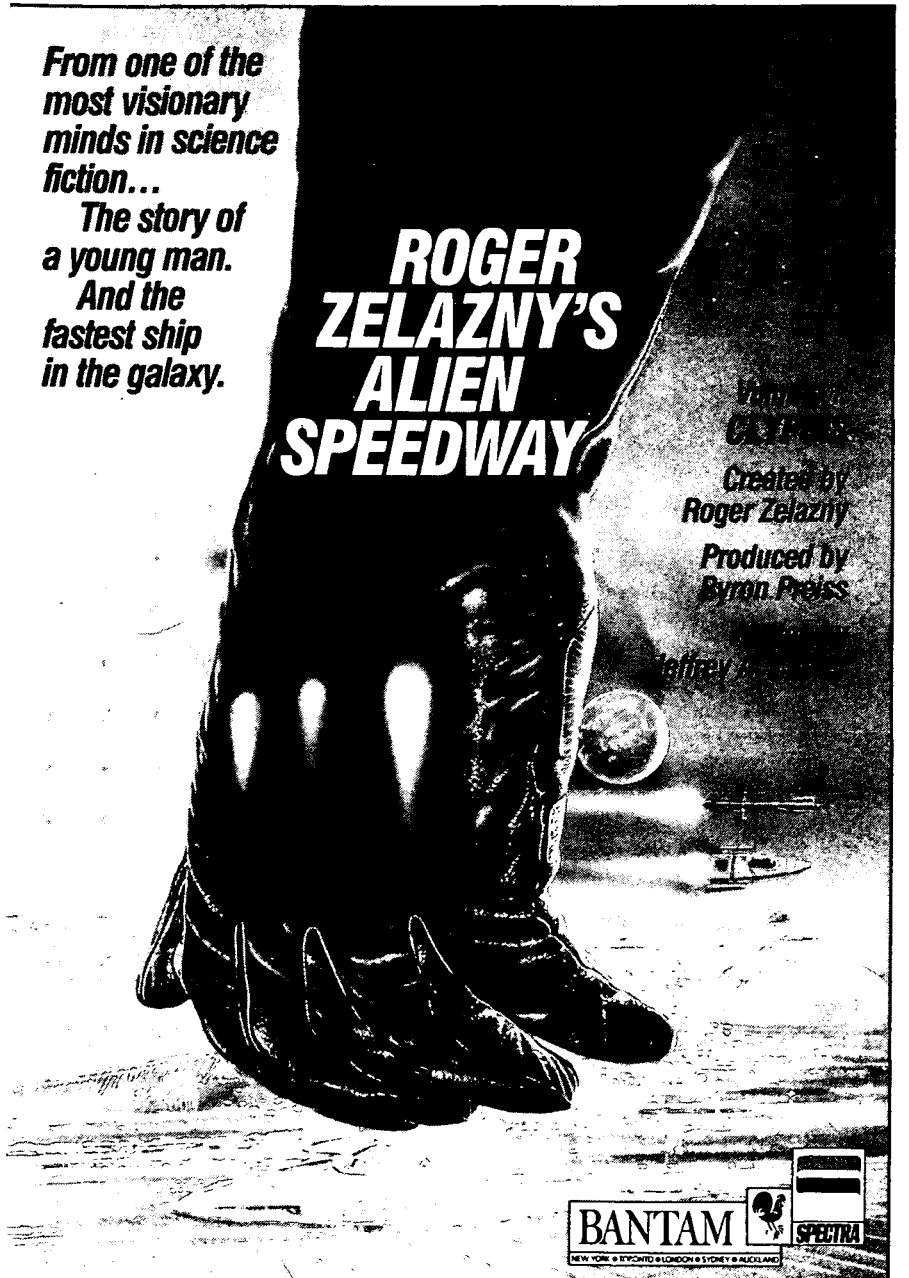
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of botanical fashion. In the center of it is a small rose garden with a white fountain; on the edge of the fountain sit two foreshortened figures, very close to one another. Just outside the center enclosure, in a cul-de-sac which anyone exiting the maze must pass, another figure stands hidden.

Left left right. Gregory wasn't explaining a new dance at all: he was telling Caitlin how to reach the rose garden, the secret place where she and Randolph hid while Alison and I searched so frantically. Doubtless he went with his wife to keep her from the spot; with Alison's bad leg, and the maze this far from the castle, it wouldn't have been difficult.

I land a few feet behind him and return to myself again. Hunger and hatred enhance my strength, already greater than his. He isn't expecting an approach from behind; I knock him flat, his weapons and charms scattering in darkness, and have his arms pinned behind his back before he can cry out. "I am not dead," I say very quietly into his ear, "but your wife is, and soon you will be."

He whimpers and struggles, but I give his arm an extra twist and he subsides, panting. "Why, Gregory? What was all of this for? So you could spy on them murmuring poetry to one another? Surely not that. Tell me!"

"So I can be a duke."

"By your wife's death?"

"By the boy's."

"How?" I answer sharply, thinking of Randolph and Caitlin sharing the same goblet. "How did you mean to kill him? More poison?"

"She will kill him," he says softly, "because she is aroused, and does not yet know her own appetites or how to control them. Is is not so, my lady?"

My own hunger is a red throbbing behind my eyes. "No, my lord. Caitlin is no murder weapon: she does not yet know what she is or where her hungers come from. She can no more feed on her own than a kitten can, who depends on the mother cat to bring food and teach it how to eat."

"You shall teach her with my puling nephew, I warrant."

"No, my lord Gregory. I shall not. I shall not teach her with you either, more's the pity; we mangle as we learn, just as kittens do—and as kittens do, she will practice on little animals as long as they will sustain her. I should like to see you mangled, my lord."

Instead I break his neck, cleanly, as I broke Alison's. Afterwards, the body still warm, I feed fully; it would be more satisfying were he still alive, but he shall have no more pleasure. Feeding me aroused him as coupling seldom did; he begged to do it more often, and now I am glad I refused. As terrible as he was, he would have been worse as one of us.

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When I am finished I lick my fingers clean, wipe my face as best I can, and drag the body back into the cul-de-sac, where it will not be immediately visible. Shaking, I hide the most obvious and dangerous of Gregory's weapons and step into the rose garden.

Caitlin, glowing in moonlight, sits on the edge of the fountain, as I saw her from the air. Randolph is handing her a white rose, which he has evidently just picked: there is blood on his hands where the thorns have scratched him. She takes the rose from him and bends to kiss his fingers, the tip of her tongue flicking towards the wounds.

"Caitlin!" She turns, startled, and lets go of Randolph's hands. "Caitlin, we must leave now."

"No," she says, her eyes very bright. "No. It is already after midnight, and you see—nothing horrid has happened."

"We must leave," I tell her firmly. "Come along."

"But I can come back?" she says, laughing, and then to Randolph, "I'll come back. Soon, I promise you. The next dance, or before that even. Godmother, promise I can come back—"

"Come along, Caitlin! Randolph, we bid you goodnight—"

"May I see you out of the maze, my ladies?"

I think of the watchers on the road, the watchers who may have been set on the maze by now. I wish I could warn him, teach him of the world in an instant. Disguise yourself, Randolph; leave this place as quickly as you can, and steal down swift and secret roads to your father's bedside.

But I cannot yet speak freely in front of Caitlin, and we have time only to save ourselves. Perhaps the maze will protect him, for a little while. "Thank you, my lord, but we know the way. Pray you stay here and think kindly of us; my magic is aided by good wishes."

"Then you shall have them in abundance, whatever my aunt says."

Caitlin comes at last, dragging and prattling. On my own I would escape with shape-changing, but Caitlin doesn't have those skills yet, and were I to tell her of our danger now she would panic and become unmanageable. So I lead her, right right left, right right left, through interminable turns.

But we meet no one else in the maze, and when at last we step into open air there are no priests waiting in ambush. Music still sounds faintly from the castle; the host and hostess have not yet been missed, and the good father must still be muttering incantations in his chamber.

And so we reach the carriage safely; I deposit Caitlin inside and instruct the driver to take us to one of the spots I have prepared for such emergencies. We should be there well before sun-up. I can only hope Lady Alison's watchers have grown tired or afraid, and left off their vigil; there is no way to be sure. I listen for hoofbeats on the road behind us and hear nothing. Perhaps, this time, we have been lucky.

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Caitlin doesn't know what I saw, there in the rose garden. She babbles about it in the carriage. "We went into the garden, in the moonlight—he kissed me and held my hands, because he said they were cold. His were so warm! He told me I was beautiful; he said he loved me. And he picked roses for me, and he bled where the thorns had pricked him. He bled for me, godmother—oh, this is the one! This is my prince. How could I not love him?"

I remain silent. She doesn't yet know what she loves. At length she says, "Why aren't we home yet? It's taking so long. I'm hungry. I never had any dinner."

"We aren't going home," I tell her, lighting my lantern and pulling down the shades which cover the carriage's windows. "We have been discovered, Caitlin. It is quite possible we are being followed. I am taking you somewhere safe. There will be food there."

"Discovered?" She laughs. "What have they discovered? That I am poor? That I love Randolph? What could they do to me? He will protect me; he said so. He will marry me."

This is the moment I must tell her. For all the times I have done this, it never hurts any less. "Caitlin, listen to me. You shall never marry Prince Randolph, or anyone else. It was never meant that you should. I am sorry you have to hear this now. I had wanted you to learn some gentler way." She stares at me, bewildered, and, sadly, I smile at her—that expression she has teased me about, asked me for, wondered why I withhold; and when she sees it she understands. The pale eyes go wide, the beautiful hands go to her throat; she backs away from me, crossing herself as if in imitation of Lady Alison.

"Away," she tells me, trembling. "I exorcise thee, demon. In vain dost thou boast of this deed—"

I think of kind Thomas, chanting valiantly in an empty stone chamber as men at arms wait outside the door. "Keep your charms, Caitlin. They'll do you no good. Don't you understand, child? Why do you think everyone has begun to look at you so oddly; why do you think I wouldn't give you a mirror? What do you think was in the soup I gave you?"

The hands go to her mouth now, to the small sharp teeth. She cries out, understanding everything at once—her odd lassitude after the first few balls, the blood I took from her to cure it, her changing hours and changing thirsts—and, as always, this moment of birth rends whatever I have left of a heart. Because for a moment the young creature sitting in front of me is not the apprentice hunter I have made her, but the innocent young girl who stood holding that first invitation to the ball, her heart in her eyes. *I? I have been invited?* I force myself not to turn away as Caitlin cries out, "You tricked me! The story wasn't true!"

She tears at her face with shapely nails, and ribbons of flesh follow

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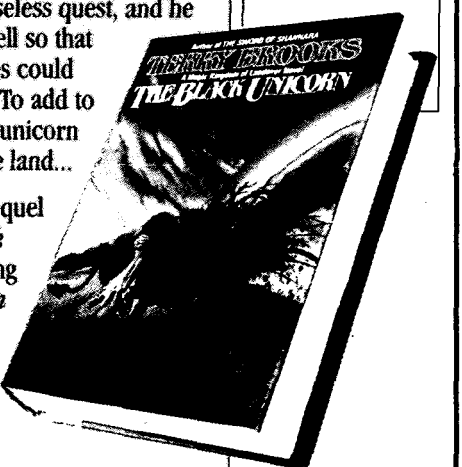

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her fingers. "You can't weep anymore," I tell her. I would weep for her, if I could. "You can't bleed, either. You're past that. Don't disfigure yourself."

"The story was a lie! None of it was true, ever—"

I make my voice as cold as iron. "The story was perfectly true, Caitlin. You were simply never told all of it before."

"It wasn't supposed to end like this!" All the tears she can't shed are in her voice. "In the story the girl falls in love and marries the prince and—everyone knows that! You lied to me! This isn't the right ending!"

"It's the only ending! The only one there is—Caitlin, surely you see that. Living women have no more protection than we do here. They feed off their men, as we do, and they require permission to enter houses and go to dances, as we do, and they depend on spells of seeming. There is only one difference: you will never, ever look like Lady Alison. You will never look like your mother. You have escaped that."

She stares at me and shrinks against the side of the carriage, holding her hands in front of her—her precious hands which Prince Randolph held, kissed, warmed with his own life. "I love him," she says defiantly. "I love him and he loves me. That part of it is true—"

"You loved his bleeding hands, Caitlin. If I hadn't interrupted, you would have fed from them, and known then, and hated him for it. And he would have hated you, for allowing him to speak of love when all along you had been precisely what his aunt warned him against."

Her mouth quivers. She hates me for having seen, and for telling her the truth. She doesn't understand our danger; she doesn't know how the woman she has scorned all these weeks died, or how close she came to dying herself.

Gregory was a clever man; the plot was a clean one. To sacrifice Randolph to Caitlin, and kill Caitlin as she tried to escape the maze; Gregory would have mourned his nephew in the proper public manner, and been declared a hero for murdering one fiend in person as the other was destroyed in the castle. Any gossip about his own soul would have been effectively stilled; perhaps he had been seduced, but surely he was pure again, to summon the righteousness to kill the beasts?

Oh yes, clever. Alison would have known the truth, and would never have accepted a title won by Randolph's murder. Alison could have ruined the entire plan, but it is easy enough to silence wives.

"Can I pray?" Caitlin demands of me, as we rattle towards daybreak. "If I can't shed tears or blood, if I can't love, can I still pray?"

"We can pray," I tell her gently, thinking again of Thomas who spared me, of those tenuous bonds between the living and the dead. "We must pray, foremost, that someone hear us. Caitlin, it's the same. The same story, with that one difference."

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She trembles, huddling against the side of the carriage, her eyes closed. When at last she speaks, her voice is stunned. "I'll never see my mother again."

"I am your mother now." What are mothers and daughters, if not women who share blood?

She whimpers in her throat then, and I stroke her hair. At last she says, "I'll never grow old."

"You will grow as old as the hills," I tell her, putting my arm around her as one comforts a child who has woken from a nightmare, "but you will never be ugly. You will always be as beautiful as you are now, as beautiful as I am. Your hair and nails will grow and I will trim them for you, to keep them lovely, and you will go to every dance, and wear different gowns to all of them."

She blinks and plucks aimlessly at the poor fabric of her dress, once again a kitchen smock. "I'll never be ugly?"

"Never," I say. "You'll never change." We cannot cry or bleed or age; there are so many things we cannot do. But for her, now, it is a comfort.

She hugs herself, shivering, and I sit beside her and hold her, rocking her towards the certain sleep which will come with dawn. It would be better if Randolph were here, with his human warmth, but at least she doesn't have to be alone. I remember my own shock and despair, although they happened longer ago than anyone who is not one of us can remember; I too tried to pray, and afterwards was thankful that my own godmother had stayed with me.

After a while Caitlin's breathing evens, and I am grateful that she hasn't said, as so many of them do, *Now I will never die.*

We shelter our young, as the mortal mothers shelter theirs—those human women who of necessity are as predatory as we, and as dependent on the invitation to feed—and so there are some truths I have not told her. She will learn them soon enough.

She is more beautiful than Lady Alison or her mother, but no less vulnerable. Her very beauty contains the certainty of her destruction. There is no law protecting women in this kingdom, where wives can be poisoned in their own halls and their murderers never punished. Still less are there laws protecting us.

I have told her she will not grow ugly, but I have not said what a curse beauty can be, how time after time she will be forced to flee the rumors of her perpetual loveliness and all that it implies. Men will arrive to feed her and kiss her and bring her roses; but for all the centuries of gentle princes swearing love, there will inevitably be someone—jealous wife or jaded lord, peasant or priest—who has heard the whispers and believed, and who will come to her resting place, in the light hours when she cannot move, bearing a hammer and a wooden stake. ●

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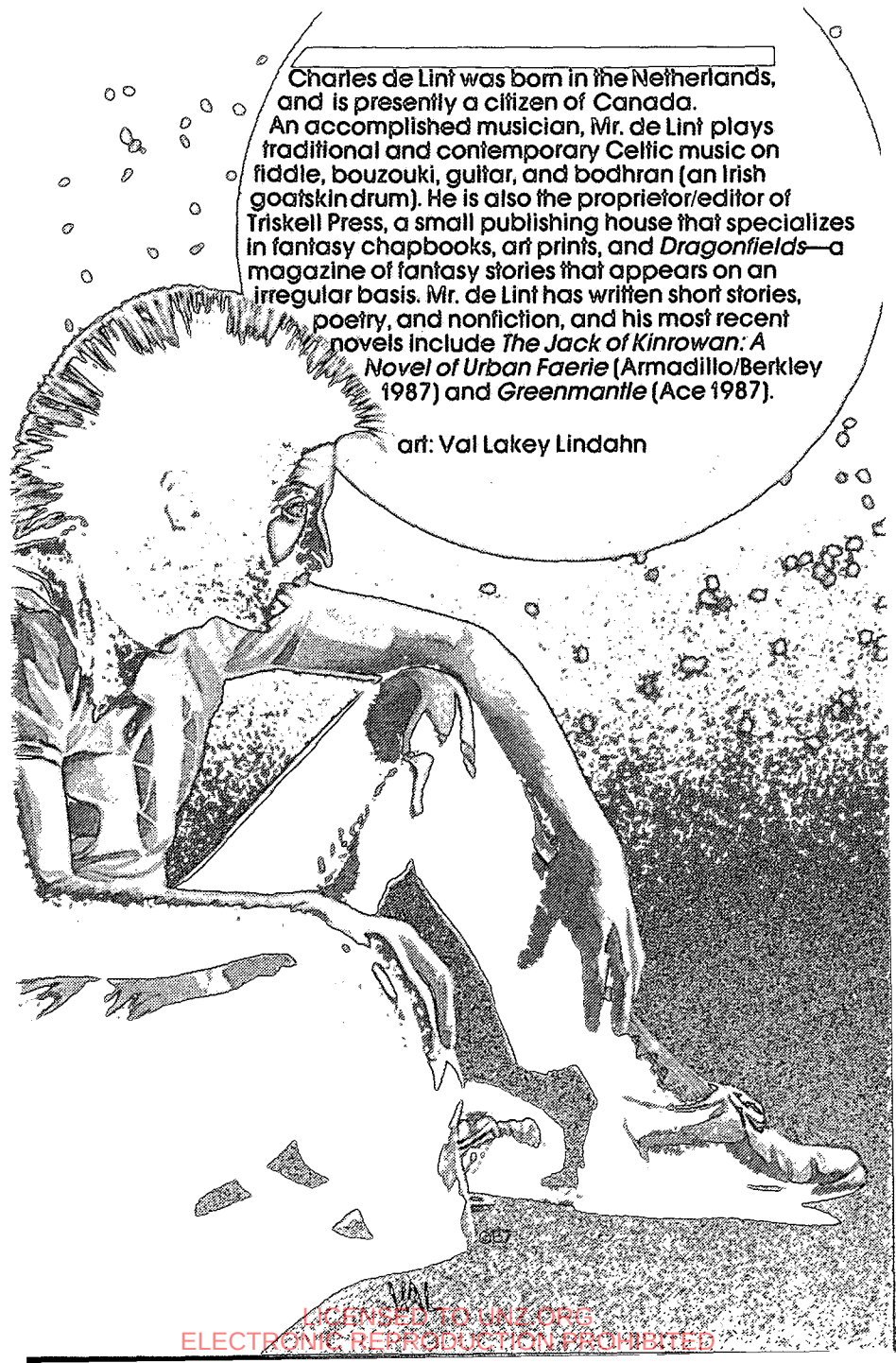
Charles de Lint was born in the Netherlands, and is presently a citizen of Canada. An accomplished musician, Mr. de Lint plays traditional and contemporary Celtic music on fiddle, bouzouki, guitar, and bodhran (an Irish goatskin drum). He is also the proprietor/editor of Triskell Press, a small publishing house that specializes in fantasy chapbooks, art prints, and *Dragonfields*—a magazine of fantasy stories that appears on an irregular basis. Mr. de Lint has written short stories, poetry, and nonfiction, and his most recent novels include *The Jack of Kinrowan: A Novel of Urban Faerie* (Armadillo/Berkley 1987) and *Greenmantle* (Ace 1987).

art: Val Lakey Lindahn



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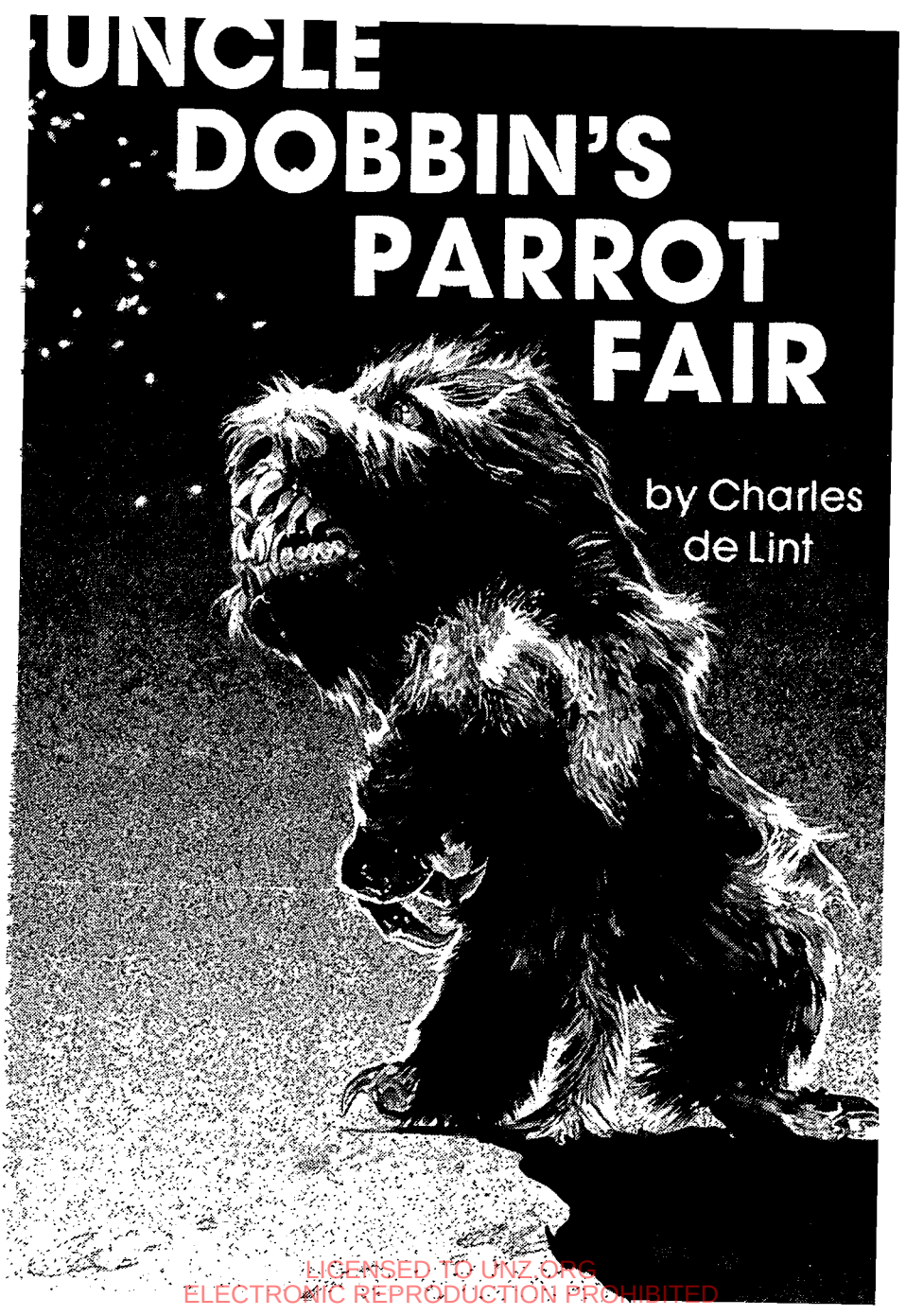
UNCLE DOBBIN'S PARROT FAIR

by Charles de Lint



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1.

She would see them in the twilight when the wind was right, roly-poly shapes propelled by ocean breezes, turning end-over-end along the beach or down the alley behind her house like errant beach balls granted a moment's freedom. Sometimes they would get caught up against a building or stuck on a curb and then spindly little arms and legs would unfold from their fat bodies until they could push themselves free and go rolling with the wind again. Like flotsam in a river, like tumbleweeds, only brightly colored in primary reds and yellows and blues.

They seemed very solid until the wind died down. Then she would watch them come apart like morning mist before the sun, the bright colors turning to ragged ribbons that tattered smoke-like until they were completely gone.

Those were special nights, the evenings that the Balloon Men came.

In the late sixties in Haight Ashbury, she talked about them once. Incense lay thick in the air—two cones of jasmine burning on a battered windowsill. There was an old iron bed in the room, up on the third floor of a house that no one lived in except for runaways and street people. The mattress had rust-colored stains on it. The incense covered the room's musty smell. She'd lived in a form of self-imposed poverty back then, but it was all a part of the Summer of Love.

"I know what you mean, man," Greg Langman told her. "I've seen them."

He was wearing a dirty white T-shirt with a simple peace symbol on it and scuffed plastic thongs. Sticking up from the waist of his bell-bottomed jeans at a forty-five degree angle was a descant recorder. His long blond hair was tied back with a rubber band. His features were thin—an ascetic-looking face, thin and drawn-out from too much time on the streets with too little to eat, or from too much dope.

"They're like . . . " His hands moved as he spoke, trying to convey what he didn't feel words alone could say—a whole other language, she often thought, watching the long slender fingers weave through the air between them. ". . . they're just too much."

"You've really seen them?" she asked.

"Oh, yeah. Except not on the streets. They're floating high up in the air, y'know, like fat little kites."

It was such a relief to know that they were real.

" 'Course," Greg added, "I gotta do a lot of dope to clue in on 'em, man."

Ellen Brady laid her book aside. Leaning back, she flicked off the light behind her and stared out into the night. The memory had come back

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to her, so clear, so sharp, she could almost smell the incense, see Greg's hands move between them, little colored after-image traces following each movement until he had more arms than Kali.

She wondered what had ever happened to the Balloon Men.

Long light-brown hair hung like a cape to her waist. Her parents were Irish—Munster O'Healys on her mother's side, and Bradys from Derry on her father's. There was a touch of Spanish blood in her mother's side of the family, which gave her skin its warm dark cast. The Bradys were pure Irish and it was from them that she got her big-boned frame. And something else. Her eyes were a clear grey—twilight eyes, her father had liked to tease her, eyes that could see beyond the here and now into somewhere else.

She hadn't needed drugs to see the Balloon Men.

Shifting in her wicker chair, she looked up and down the beach, but it was late and the wind wasn't coming in from the ocean. The book on her lap was a comforting weight and had, considering her present state of mind, an even more appropriate title. *How to Make the Wind Blow.* If only it *was* a tutor, she thought, instead of just a collection of odd stories.

The author's name was Christy Riddell, a reed-thin Scot with a head full of sudden fancies. His hair was like an unruly hedgerow nest and he was half a head shorter than she, but she could recall dancing with him in a garden one night and she hadn't had a more suitable partner since. She'd met him while living in a house out east that was as odd as any flight of his imagination. Long rambling halls connected a bewildering series of rooms, each more fascinating than the next. And the libraries. She'd lived in its libraries.

"When the wind is right," began the title story, the first story in the book, "the wise man isn't half so trusted as the fool."

Ellen could remember when it was still a story that was told without the benefit of pen and paper. A story that changed each time the words traveled from mouth to ear.

There was a gnome—or a gnomish sort of a man—named Long, who lived under the pier at the end of Main Street. He had skin as brown as dirt, eyes as blue as a clear summer sky. He was thin, with a fat tummy and a long crooked nose, and he wore raggedy clothes that he'd found discarded on the beach and worn until they were threadbare. Sometimes he bundled his tangled hair up under a bright yellow cap. Other times he wove it into many braids festooned with colored beads and the discarded tabs from beer cans that he'd polished on his sleeve until they were bright and shiny.

Though he'd seem more odd than magical to anyone who happened to

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spy him out wandering the streets or along the beach, he did have two enchantments.

One was a pig that could see the wind and follow it anywhere. She was pink and fastidiously cleanly, big enough to ride to market—which Long sometimes did—and she could talk. Not pig-talk, or even pig-Latin, but plain English that anyone could understand if they took the time to listen. Her name changed from telling to telling, but by the time Long's story appeared in the book either she or Christy had settled on Brigwin.

Long's other enchantment was a piece of plain string with four complicated elf-knots tied in it—one to call up a wind from each of the four quarters. North and south. East and west. When he untied a knot, that wind would rise up and he'd ride Brigwin in its wake, sifting through the debris and pickings left behind for treasures or charms, though what Long considered a treasure, another might throw out, and what he might consider a charm, another might see as only an old button or a bit of tangled wool. He had a good business trading his findings to woodwives and witches and the like that he met at the market when midnight was past and gone, ordinary folk were in bed, and the beach towns belonged to those who hid by day, but walked the streets by night.

Ellen carried a piece of string in her pocket, with four complicated knots tied into it, but no matter how often she undid one, she still had to wait for her winds like anyone else. She knew that strings to catch and call up the wind were only real in stories, but she liked thinking that maybe, just once, a bit of magic could tiptoe out of a tale and step into the real world. Until that happened, she had to be content with what writers like Christy put to paper.

He called them mythistories, those odd little tales of his. They were the ghosts of fancies that he would track down from time to time and trap on paper. Oddities. Some charming, some grotesque. All of them enchanting. Foolishness, he liked to say, offered from one fool to others.

Ellen smiled. Oh, yes. But when the wind is right. . . .

She'd never talked to Christy about the Balloon Men, but she didn't doubt that he knew them.

Leaning over the rail of the balcony, two stories above the walkway that ran the length of the beach, Christy's book held tight in one hand, she wished very hard to see those roly-poly figures one more time. The ocean beat its rhythm against the sand. A light breeze caught at her hair and twisted it into her face.

When the wind is right.

Something fluttered inside her, like wings unfolding, readying for flight. Rising from her chair, she set the book down on a wicker arm and went inside. Down the stairs and out the front door. She could feel a

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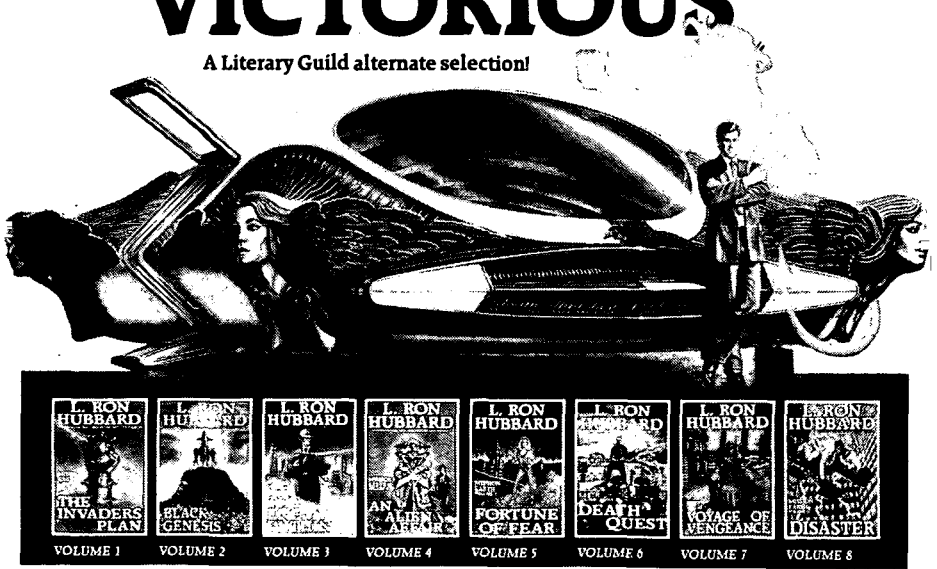

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thrumming between her ears that had to be excitement moving blood more quickly through her veins, though it could be an echo of a half-lost memory—a singing of small deep voices, rising up from diaphragms nestled in fat little bellies.

Perhaps the wind *was* right, she thought as she stepped out onto the walkway. A quarter moon peeked at her from above the oil rigs far out from the shore. She put her hand in the pocket of her cotton pants and wound the knotted string she found there around one finger. It was late, late for the Balloon Men to be rolling, but she didn't doubt that there was something waiting to greet her out on the street. Perhaps only memories. Perhaps a fancy that Christy hadn't trapped on a page yet.

There was only one way to find out.

2.

Peregrin Laurie was sharp-faced like a weasel—a narrow-shouldered thin whip of a teenager in jeans and a torn T-shirt. He sat in a doorway, knees up by his chin, a mane of spiked multi-colored hair standing straight up from his head in a two-inch Mohawk swath that ran down to the nape of his neck like a lizard's crest fringes. Wrapping his arms around bruised ribs, he held back tears as each breath he took made his chest burn.

Goddamn beach bums. The bastards had just about killed him and he had no one to blame but himself. Scuffing through a parking lot, he should have taken off when the car pulled up. But no. He had to be the poseur and hold his ground, giving them a long cool look as they came piling drunkenly out of the car. By the time he realized just how many of them there were and what they had planned for him, it was too late to run. He'd had to stand there then, heart hammering in his chest, and hope bravado'd see him through, because there was no way he could handle them all.

They didn't stop to chat. They just laid into him. He got a few licks in, but he knew it was hopeless. By the time he hit the pavement, all he could do was curl up into a tight ball and take their drunken kicks, cursing them with each fiery gasp of air he dragged into his lungs.

The booger waited until he was down and hurting before making its appearance. It came out from under the pier that ran by the parking lot, black and greasy, with hot eyes and a mouthful of barracuda teeth. If it hadn't hurt so much just to breathe, he would have laughed at the way his attackers backed away from the creature, eyes bulging as they rushed to their car. They took off, tires squealing, but not before the booger took a chunk of metal out of the rear fender with one swipe of a paw.

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It came back to look at him—black nightmare head snuffling at him as he lifted his head and wiped the blood from his face, then moving away as he reached out a hand towards it. It smelled like a sewer and looked worse, a squat creature that had to have been scraped out of some monstrous nose, with eyes like hot coals in a smear of a face and a slick wet look to its skin. A booger, plain and simple. Only it was alive, clawed and toothed. Following him around ever since he'd run away. . . .

His parents were both burnouts from the sixties. They lived in West Hollywood and got more embarrassing the older he became. Take his name. Laurie was bad enough, but Peregrin . . . Lifted straight out of that *Lord of the Rings* book. An okay read, sure, but you don't use it to name your kid. Maybe he should just be thankful he didn't get stuck with Frodo or Bilbo. By the time he was old enough to start thinking for himself, he'd picked out his own name and wouldn't answer to anything but Reece. He'd gotten it out of some book, too, but at least it sounded cool. You needed all the cool you could get with parents like his.

His old man still had hair down to his ass. He wore wire-framed glasses and listened to shit on the stereo that sounded as burned-out as he looked. The old lady wasn't much better. Putting on weight like a whale, hair a frizzy brown, as long as the old man's, but usually hanging in a braid. Coming home late some nights, the whole house'd have the sweet smell of weed mixed with incense and they'd give him these goofy looks and talk about getting in touch with the cosmos and other spacey shit. When anybody came down on him for the way he looked, or for dropping out of school, all they said was let him do his own thing. His own thing. Jesus. Give me a break. With that kind of crap to look forward to at home, who wouldn't take off first chance they got? Though wouldn't you know it, no sooner did he get free of them than the booger latched onto him, following him around, skulking in the shadows.

At first, Reece never got much of a look at the thing—just glimpses out of the corner of his eyes—and that was more than enough. But sleeping on the beaches and in parks, some nights he'd wake with that sewer smell in his nostrils and catch something slipping out of sight, a dark wet shadow moving close to the ground. After a few weeks, it started to get bolder, sitting on its haunches a half-dozen yards from wherever he was bedding down, the hot coal eyes fixed on him.

Reece didn't know what it was or what it wanted. Was it looking out for him, or saving him up for its supper? Sometimes he thought, what with all the drugs his parents had done back in the sixties—good times for them, shit for him because he'd been born and that was when his troubles had started—he was sure that all those chemicals had fucked

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up his genes. Twisted something in his head so that he imagined he had this two-foot high, walking, grunting booger following him around.

Like the old man'd say. Bummer.

Sucker sure seemed real, though.

Reece held his hurt to himself, ignoring Ellen as she approached. When she stopped in front of him, he gave her a scowl.

"Are you okay?" she asked, leaning closer to look at him.

He gave her a withering glance. The long hair and jeans, flowered blouse. Just what he needed. Another sixties burn-out.

"Why don't you just fuck off and die?" he said.

But Ellen looked past the tough pose to see the blood on his shirt, the bruising on his face that the shadows half-hid, the hurt he was trying so hard to pretend wasn't there.

"Where do you live?" she asked.

"What's it to you?"

Ignoring his scowl, she bent down and started to help him to his feet.

"Aw, shit—" Reece began, but it was easier on his ribs to stand up than to fight her.

"Let's get you cleaned up," she said.

"Florence fucking Nightingale," he muttered, but she merely led him back the way she'd come.

From under the pier a wet shadow stirred at their departure. Reece's booger drew back lips that had the rubbery texture of an octopus' skin. Row on row of pointed teeth reflected back the light from the streetlights. Hate-hot eyes glimmered red. On silent leathery paws, the creature followed the slow-moving pair, grunting softly to itself, claws clicking on the pavement.

3.

Bramley Dapple was the wizard in "A Week of Saturdays," the third story in Christy Riddell's *How to Make the Wind Blow*. He was a small wizened old man, spry as a kitten, thin as a reed, with features lined and brown as a dried fig. He wore a pair of wire-rimmed spectacles without prescription lenses that he polished incessantly, and he loved to talk.

"It doesn't matter what they believe," he was saying to his guest, "so much as what *you* believe."

He paused as the brown-skinned goblin who looked after his house came in with a tray of biscuits and tea. His name was Goon, a tallish

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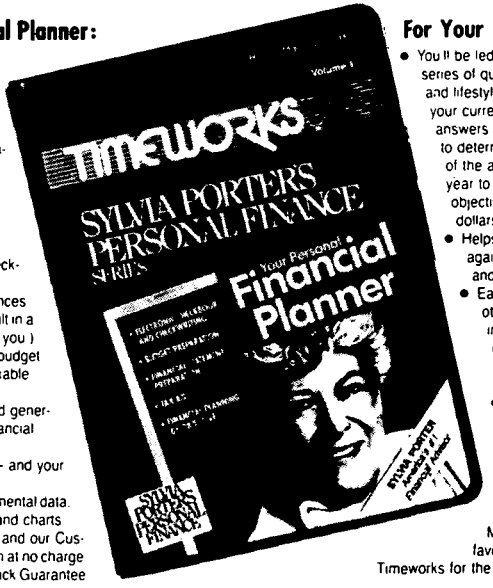

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creature at three-foot-four who wore the garb of an organ-grinder's monkey: striped black and yellow trousers, a red jacket with yellow trim, small black slippers, and a little green and yellow cap that pushed down an unruly mop of thin, dark, curly hair. Gangly limbs with a protruding tummy, puffed cheeks, a wide nose, and tiny black eyes added to his monkey-like appearance.

The wizard's guest observed Goon's entrance with a startled look which pleased Bramley to no end.

"There," he said. "Goon proves my point."

"I beg your pardon?"

"We live in a consensual reality where things exist because we want them to exist. I believe in Goon, Goon believes in Goon, and you, presented with his undeniable presence, teatray in hand, believe in Goon as well. Yet, if you were to listen to the world at large, Goon is nothing more than a figment of some fevered writer's imagination—a literary construct, an artistic representation of something that can't possibly exist in the world as we know it."

Goon gave Bramley a sour look, but the wizard's guest leaned forward, hand outstretched, and brushed the goblin's shoulder with a feather-light touch. Slowly she leaned back into the big armchair, cushions so comfortable they seemed to embrace her as she settled against them.

"So . . . *anything* we can imagine can exist?" she asked finally.

Goon turned his sour look on her now.

She was a student at the university where the wizard taught; senior, majoring in fine arts, and she had the look of an artist about her. There were old paint stains on her jeans and under her fingernails. Her hair was a thick brown tangle, more unruly than Goon's curls. She had a smudge of a nose and thin puckering lips, workman's boots that stood by the door with a history of scuffs and stains written into their leather, thick woolen socks with a hole in the left heel, and one shirttail that had escaped the waist of her jeans. But her eyes were a pale, pale blue, clear and alert, for all the casualness of her attire.

Her name was Jilly Coppercorn.

Bramley shook his head. "It's not imagining. It's *knowing* that it exists—without one smidgen of doubt."

"Yes, but someone had to think him up for him to . . . " She hesitated as Goon's scowl deepened. "That is . . . "

Bramley continued to shake his head. "There *is* some semblance of order to things," he admitted, "for if the world was simply everyone's different conceptual universe mixed up together, we'd have nothing but chaos. It all relies on will, you see—to observe the changes, at any rate. Or the differences. The anomalies. Like Goon—oh, do stop scowling," he added to the goblin.

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"The world as we have it," he went on to Jilly, "is here mostly because of habit. We've all agreed that certain things exist—we're taught as impressionable infants that this is a table and this is what it looks like, that's a tree out the window there, a dog looks and sounds just so. At the same time we're informed that Goon and his like don't exist, so we don't—or can't see them."

"They're not made up?" Jilly asked.

This was too much for Goon. He set the tray down and gave her leg a pinch. Jilly jumped away from him, trying to back deeper into the chair as the goblin grinned, revealing two rows of decidedly nasty-looking teeth.

"Rather impolite," Bramley said, "but I suppose you do get the point?"

Jilly nodded quickly. Still grinning, Goon set about pouring their teas.

"So," Jilly asked, "how can someone . . . how can *I* see things as they really are?"

"Well, it's not that simple," the wizard told her. "First you have to know what it is that you're looking for—before you can find it, you see."

Ellen closed the book and leaned back in her own chair, thinking about that, about Balloon Men, about the young man lying in her bed. To know what you were looking for. Was that why when she went out hoping to find Balloon Men, she'd come home with Reece?

She got up and went to the bedroom door to look in at him. After much protesting, he'd finally let her clean his hurts and put him to bed. Claiming to be not the least bit hungry, he'd polished off a whole tin of soup and the better part of the loaf of sourdough bread that she had just bought that afternoon. Then, of course, he wasn't tired at all and promptly fell asleep the moment his head touched the pillow.

She shook her head, looking at him now. His rainbow Mohawk made it look as though she'd brought some hybrid creature into her home—part rooster, part boy, it lay in her bed snoring softly, hardly real. But definitely not a Balloon Man, she thought, looking at his thin torso under the sheets.

About to turn away, something at the window caught her eye. Frozen in place, she saw a dog-like face peering back at her from the other side of the pane—which was patently impossible since the bedroom was on the second floor and there was nothing to stand on outside that window. But impossible or not, that dog-like face with its coal-red eyes and a fierce grin of glimmering teeth was there all the same.

She stared at it, feeling sick as the moments ticked by. Hunger burned in those eyes. Anger. Unbridled hate. She couldn't move, not until it finally disappeared—sliding from sight, physically escaping rather than vanishing the way a hallucination should.

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She leaned weakly against the doorjamb, a faint buzzing in her head. Not until she'd caught her breath did she go to the window, but of course there was nothing there. Consensual reality, Christy's wizard had called it. Things that exist because we want them to exist. But she knew that not even in a nightmare would she consider giving life to that monstrous head she'd seen staring back in at her from the night beyond her window.

Her gaze went to the sleeping boy in her bed. All that anger burning up inside him. Had she caught a glimpse of something that *he'd* given life to?

Ellen, she told herself as she backed out of the room, you're making entirely too much out of nothing. Except something had certainly seemed to be there. There was absolutely no question in her mind that *something* had been out there.

In the living room she looked down at Christy's book. Bramley Dapple's words skittered through her mind, chased by a feeling of . . . of strangeness that she couldn't shake. The wind, the night, finding Reece in that doorway. And now that thing in the window.

She went and poured herself a brandy before making her bed on the sofa, studiously avoiding looking at the windows. She knew she was being silly—she had to have imagined it—but there was a feeling in the air tonight, a sense of being on the edge of something vast and grey. One false step, and she'd plunge down into it. A void. A nightmare.

It took a second brandy before she fell asleep.

Outside, Reece's booger snuffled around the walls of the house, crawling up the side of the building from time to time to peer into this or that window. Something kept it from entering—some disturbance in the air that was like a wind, but not a wind at the same time. When it finally retreated, it was with the knowledge in what passed for its mind that time itself was the key. Hours and minutes would unlock whatever kept it presently at bay.

Barracuda teeth gleamed as the creature grinned. It could wait. Not long, but it could wait.

4.

Ellen woke the next morning, stiff from a night spent on the sofa, and wondered what in God's name had possessed her to bring Reece home. Though on reflection, she realized, the whole night had proceeded with a certain surreal quality of which Reece had only been a small part. Rereading Christy's book. That horrific face at the window. And the Balloon Men—she hadn't thought of them in years.

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One man's journey
to the new promised land...,
and onto the trail
of a killer.

DOVER BEACH

BY

RICHARD BOWKER

BANTAM
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Swinging her feet to the floor, she went out onto her balcony. There was a light fog hazing the air. Surfers were riding the waves close by the pier—only a handful of them now, but in an hour or so their numbers would have multiplied beyond count. Raking machines were cleaning the beach, their dull roar vying with the pounding of the tide. Men with metal detectors were patiently sifting through the debris the machines left behind before the trucks came to haul it away. Near the tide's edge a man was jogging backwards across the sand, sharply silhouetted against the ocean.

Nothing out of the ordinary. But returning inside she couldn't shake the feeling that there was someone in her head, something flying dark-winged across her inner terrain like a crow. When she went to wash up, she found its crow eyes staring back at her from the mirror. Wild eyes.

Shivering, she finished up quickly. By the time Reece woke she was sitting outside on the balcony in a sweatshirt and shorts, nursing a mug of coffee. The odd feeling of being possessed had mostly gone away and the night just past took on the fading quality of half-remembered dreams.

She looked up at his appearance, smiling at the way a night's sleep had rearranged the lizard crest fringes of his Mohawk. Some of it was pressed flat against his skull. Elsewhere, multicolored tufts stood up at bizarre angles. His mouth was a sullen slash in a field of short beard stubble, but his eyes still had a sleepy look to them, softening his features.

"You do this a lot?" he asked, slouching into the other wicker chair on the balcony.

"What? Drink coffee in the morning?"

"Pick up strays."

"You looked like you needed help."

Reece nodded. "Right. We're all brothers and sisters on starship earth. I kinda figured you for a bleeding heart."

His harsh tone soured Ellen's humor. She felt the something that had watched her from the bathroom mirror flutter inside her and her thoughts returned to the previous night. Christy's wizard talking. *Things exist because we want them to exist.*

"After you fell asleep," she said, "I thought I saw something peering in through the bedroom window . . . "

Her voice trailed off when she realized that she didn't quite know where she was going with that line of thought. But Reece sat up from his slouch, suddenly alert.

"What kind of something?" he asked.

Ellen tried to laugh it off. "A monster," she said with a smile. "Red-eyed and all teeth." She shrugged. "I was just having one of those nights."

"You *saw* it?" Reece demanded sharply enough to make Ellen sit up straighter as well.

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"Well, I thought I saw something, but it was patently impossible so . . ." Again her voice trailed off. Reece had sunk back into his chair and was staring off towards the ocean. "What . . . what was it?" Ellen asked.

"I call it booger," he replied. "I don't know what the hell it is, but it's been following me ever since I took off from my parents' place. . . . "

The stories in Christy's book weren't all charming. There was one near the end called "Raw Eggs" about a man who had a *Ghostbusters*-like creature living in his fridge that fed on raw eggs. It pierced the shells with a needle-fine tooth, then sucked out the contents, leaving rows of empty eggshells behind. When the man got tired of replacing his eggs, the creature crawled out of the fridge one night, driven forth by hunger, and fed on the eyes of the man's family.

The man had always had a fear of going blind. He died at the end of the story, and the creature moved on to another household, more hungry than ever. . . .

Reece laid aside Christy Riddell's book and went looking for Ellen. He found her sitting on the beach, a big, loose T-shirt covering her bikini, her bare legs tucked under her. She was staring out to sea, past the waves breaking on the shore, past the swimmers, body-surfers, and kids riding their surfboards, past the oil rigs, to the horizon hidden in a haze in the far-off distance. He got a lot of weird stares as he scuffed his way across the sand to finally sit down beside her.

"They're just stories in that book, right?" he said finally.

"You tell me."

"Look. The booger, it's—Christ, I don't know what it is. But it can't be real."

Ellen shrugged. "I was up getting some milk at John's earlier," she said, "and I overheard a couple of kids talking about some friends of theirs. Seems they were having some fun in the parking lot last night with a punker when something came at them from under the pier and tore off part of their bumper."

"Yeah, but—"

Ellen turned from the distant view to look at him. Her eyes held endless vistas in them and she felt the flutter of wings in her mind.

"I want to know how you did it," she said. "How you brought it to life."

"Look, lady. I don't—"

"It doesn't have to be a horror," she said fiercely. "It can be something good, too." She thought of the gnome that lived under the pier in Christy's story and her own Balloon Men. "I want to be able to see them again."

Their gazes locked. Reece saw a darkness behind Ellen's clear grey eyes, some wildness that reminded him of his booger in its intensity.

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"I'd tell you if I knew," he said finally.

Ellen continued to study him, then slowly turned to look back across the waves. "Will it come to you tonight?" she asked.

"I don't kn—" Reece began, but Ellen turned to him again. At the look in her eyes, he nodded. "Yeah," he said then. "I guess it will."

"I want to be there when it does," she said.

Because if it was real, then it could all be real. If she could see the booger, if she could understand what animated it, if she could learn to really *see* and, as Christy's wizard had taught Jilly Coppercorn, *know* what she was looking for herself, then she could bring her own touch of wonder into the world. Her own magic.

She gripped Reece's arm. "Promise me you won't take off until I've had a chance to see it."

She had to be weirded-out, Reece thought. She didn't have the same kind of screws loose that his parents did, but she was gone all the same. Only, that book she'd had him read . . . it made a weird kind of sense. If you were going to accept that kind of shit as being possible, it might just work the way that book said it did. Weird, yeah. But when he thought of the booger itself . . .

"Promise me," she said.

He disengaged her fingers from his arm. "Sure," he said. "I got nowhere to go anyway."

5.

They ate at The Green Pepper that night, a Mexican restaurant on Main Street. Reece studied his companion across the table, re-evaluating his earlier impressions of her. Her hair was up in a loose bun now and she wore a silky cream-colored blouse above a slim dark skirt. Mentally she was definitely a bit weird, but not a burn-out like his parents. She looked like the kind of customer who shopped in the trendy galleries and boutiques on Melrose Avenue where his old lady worked, back home in West Hollywood. Half the people in the restaurant were probably wondering what the hell she was doing sitting here with a scuzz like him.

Ellen looked up and caught his gaze. A smile touched her lips. "The cook must be in a good mood," she said.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I've heard that the worse mood he's in, the hotter he makes his sauces."

Reece tried to give her back a smile, but his heart wasn't in it. He wanted a beer, but they wouldn't serve him here because he was underage. He found himself wishing Ellen wasn't so much older than him, that

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he didn't look like such a freak sitting here with her. For the first time since he'd done his hair, he was embarrassed about the way he looked. He wanted to enjoy just sitting here with her instead of knowing that everyone was looking at him like he was some kind of geek.

"You okay?" Ellen asked.

"Yeah. Sure. Great food."

He pushed the remainder of his rice around on the plate with his fork. Yeah, he had no problems. Just no place to go, no place to fit in. Body aching from last night's beating. Woman sitting there across from him, looking tasty, but she was too old for him and there was something in her eyes that scared him a little. Not to mention a nightmare booger dogging his footsteps. Sure. Things were just rocking, mama.

He stole another glance at her, but she was looking away, out to the darkening street, wine glass raised to her mouth.

"That book your friend wrote," he said.

Her gaze shifted to his face and she put her glass down.

"It doesn't have anything like my booger in it," Reece continued. "I mean it's got some ugly stuff, but nothing just like the booger."

"No," Ellen replied. "But it's got to work the same way. We can see it because we believe it's there."

"So was it always there and we're just aware of it now? Or does it exist *because* we believe in it? Is it something that came out of us—out of me?"

"Like Uncle Dobbin's birds, you mean?"

Reece nodded, unaware of the flutter of dark wings that Ellen felt stir inside her.

"I don't know," she said softly.

"Uncle Dobbin's Parrot Fair" was the last story in Christy Riddell's book, the title coming from the name of the pet shop that Timothy James Dobbin owned in Santa Ana. It was a gathering place for every kind of bird, tame as well as wild. There were finches in cages and parrots with the run of the shop, not to mention everything from sparrows to crows and gulls crowding around outside.

In the story, T.J. Dobbin was a retired sailor with an interest in nineteenth century poets, an old bearded tar with grizzled red hair and beetling brows who wore baggy blue cotton trousers and a white T-shirt as he worked in his store, cleaning the bird cages, feeding the parakeets, teaching the parrots words. Everybody called him Uncle Dobbin.

He had a sixteen-year-old assistant named Nori Wert who helped out on weekends. She had short blonde hair and a deep tan that she started working on as soon as school was out. To set it off she invariably wore white shorts and a tank top. The only thing she liked better than the

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beach was the birds in Uncle Dobbin's shop, and that was because she knew their secret.

She didn't find out about them right away. It took a year or so of coming in and hanging around the shop and then another three weekends of working there before she finally approached Uncle Dobbin with what had been bothering her.

"I've been wondering," she said as she sat down on the edge of his cluttered desk at the back of the store. She fingered the world globe beside the blotter and gave it a desultory spin.

Uncle Dobbin raised his brow questioningly and continued to fill his pipe.

"It's the birds," she said. "We never sell any—at least not since I've started working here. People come in and they look around, but no one asks the price of anything, no one ever buys anything. I guess you could do most of your business during the week, but then why did you hire me?"

Uncle Dobbin looked down into the bowl of his pipe to make sure the tobacco was tamped properly. "Because you like birds," he said before he lit a match. Smoke wreathed up towards the ceiling. A bright green parrot gave a squawk from where it was roosting nearby and turned its back on them.

"But you don't sell any of them, do you?" Being curious, she'd poked through his file cabinet to look at invoices and sales receipts to find that all he ever bought was birdfood and cages and the like, and he never sold a thing. At least no sales were recorded.

"Can't sell them."

"Why not?"

"They're not mine to sell."

Nori sighed. "Then whose are they?"

"Better you should ask *what* are they."

"Okay," Nori said, giving him an odd look. "I'll bite. What are they?"

"Magic."

Nori studied him for a moment and he returned her gaze steadily, giving no indication that he was teasing her. He puffed on his pipe, a serious look in his eyes, then took the pipe stem from his mouth. Setting the pipe carefully on the desk so that it wouldn't tip over, he leaned forward in his chair.

"People have magic," he said, "but most of them don't want it, or don't believe in it, or did once, but then forgot. So I take that magic and make it into birds until they want it back, or someone else can use it."

"Magic."

"That's right."

"Not birds."

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Uncle Dobbin nodded.

"That's crazy," Nori said.

"Is it?"

He got up stiffly from his chair and stood in front of her with his hands outstretched towards her chest. Nori shrank back from him, figuring he'd flaked out and was going to cop a quick feel now, but his hands paused just a few inches from her breasts. She felt a sudden pain inside—like a stitch in her side from running too hard, only it was deep in her chest. Right in her lungs. She looked down, eyes widening as a beak appeared poking out of her chest, followed by a parrot's head, its body and wings.

It was like one of the holograms at the Haunted House in Disneyland, for she could see right through it, then it grew solid once it was fully emerged. The pain stopped as the bird fluttered free, but she felt an empty aching inside. Uncle Dobbin caught the bird, and soothed it with a practiced touch, before letting it fly free. Numbly, Nori watched it wing across the store and settle down near the front window where it began to preen its feathers. The sense of loss inside grew stronger.

"That . . . it was in me . . . I . . . "

Uncle Dobbin made his way back to his chair and sat down, picking up his pipe once more.

"Magic," he said before he lit it.

"My . . . my magic . . .?"

Uncle Dobbin nodded. "But not anymore. You didn't believe."

"But I didn't know!" she wailed.

"You got to earn it back now," Uncle Dobbin told her. "The side cages need cleaning."

Nori pressed her hands against her chest, then wrapped her arms around herself in a tight hug as though that would somehow ease the empty feeling inside her.

"E-earn it?" she said in a small voice, her gaze going from his face to the parrot that had come out of her chest and was now sitting by the front window. "By . . . by working here?"

Uncle Dobbin shook his head. "You already work here and I pay you for that, don't I?"

"But then how . . .?"

"You've got to earn its trust. You've got to learn to believe in it again."

Ellen shook her head softly. Learn to believe, she thought. I've always believed. But maybe never hard enough. She glanced at her companion, then out to the street. It was almost completely dark now.

"Let's go walk on the beach," she said.

Reece nodded, following her outside after she'd paid the bill. The le-

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mony smell of eucalyptus trees was strong in the air for a moment, then the stronger scent of the ocean winds stole it away.

6.

They had the beach to themselves, though the pier was busy with strollers and people fishing. At the beach end of the long wooden structure, kids were hanging out, fooling around with bikes and skateboards. The soft boom of the tide drowned out the music of their ghetto blasters. The wind was cool with a salt tang as it came in from over the waves. In the distance, the oil rigs were lit up like Christmas trees.

Ellen took off her shoes. Carrying them in her tote bag, she walked in the wet sand by the water's edge. A raised lip of the beach hid the shorefront houses from their view as they walked south to the rocky spit that marked the beginning of the Naval Weapons Station.

"It's nice out here," Reece said finally. They hadn't spoken since leaving the restaurant.

Ellen nodded. "A lot different from L.A."

"Two different worlds."

Ellen gave him a considering glance. Ever since this afternoon, the sullen tone had left his voice. She listened now as he spoke of his parents and how he couldn't find a place for himself either in their world, or that of his peers.

"You're pretty down on the sixties," she said when he was done.

Reece shrugged. He was barefoot now, too, the waves coming up to lick the bottom of his jeans where the two of them stood at the water's edge.

"They had some good ideas—people like my parents," he said, "but the way they want things to go . . . that only works if everyone agrees to live that way."

"That doesn't invalidate the things they believe in."

"No. But what we've got to deal with is the real world and you've got to take what you need if you want to survive in it."

Ellen sighed. "I suppose."

She looked back across the beach, but they were still alone. No one else out for a late walk across the sand. No booger. No Balloon Men. But something fluttered inside her, dark-winged. A longing as plain as what she heard in Reece's voice, though she was looking for magic and he was just looking for a way to fit in.

Hefting her tote bag, she tossed it onto the sand, out of the waves' reach. Reece gave her a curious look, then averted his gaze as she stepped out of her skirt.

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"It's okay," she said, amused at his sudden sense of propriety. "I'm wearing my bathing suit."

By the time he turned back, her blouse and skirt had joined her tote bag on the beach and she was shaking loose her hair.

"Coming in?" she asked.

Reece simply stood and watched the sway of her hips as she headed for the water. Her bathing suit was white. In the poor light it was as though she wasn't wearing anything—the bathing suit looking like untanned skin. She dove cleanly into a wave, head bobbing up pale in the dark water when she surfaced.

"C'mon!" she called to him. "The water's fine, once you get in."

Reece hesitated. He'd wanted to go in this afternoon, but hadn't had the nerve to bare his white skinny limbs in front of a beachful of serious tanners. Well, there was no one to see him now, he thought as he stripped down to his underwear.

The water hit him like a cold fist when he dove in after her and he came up gasping with shock. His body tingled, every pore stung alert. Ellen drifted further out, riding the waves easily. As he waded out to join her, a swell rose up and tumbled him back to shore in a spill of floundering limbs that scraped him against the sand.

"Either go under or over them," Ellen advised him as he started back out.

He wasn't much of a swimmer, but the water wasn't too deep except when a big wave came. He went under the next one and came up sputtering, but pleased with himself for not getting thrown up against the beach again.

"I love swimming at night," Ellen said as they drifted together.

Reece nodded. The water was surprisingly warm, too, once you were in it. You could lose all sense of time out here, just floating with the swells.

"You do this a lot?" he asked.

Ellen shook her head. "It's not that good an idea to do this alone. If the undertow got you, it'd pull you right out and no one would know."

Reece laid his head back in the water and looked up at the sky. Though they were less than an hour by the freeway out of downtown L.A., the sky seemed completely different here. It didn't seem to have that glow from God knows how many millions of lights. The stars seemed closer here, or maybe it was that the sky seemed deeper.

He glanced over at Ellen. Their reason for being out here was forgotten. He wished he had the nerve to just sort of sidle up to her and put his arms around her, hold her close. She'd feel all slippery, but she'd feel good.

He paddled a little bit towards her, riding a swell up and then down

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again. The wave turned him slightly away from her. When he glanced back, he saw her staring wide-eyed at the shore. His gaze followed hers and then that cold he'd felt when he first entered the water returned in a numbing rush.

The booger was here.

It came snuffling over a rise in the beach, a squat dark shadow in the sand, greasy and slick as it beelined for their clothing. When it reached Ellen's tote bag, it buried its face in her skirt and blouse, then proceeded to rip them to shreds. Ellen's fingers caught his arm in a frightened grip. A wave came up, lifting his feet from the bottom. He kicked out frantically, afraid he was going to drown with her holding on to him like that, but the wave tossed them both in towards the shore.

The booger looked up, baring its barracuda teeth. The red coals of its eyes burned right into them both, pinning them there on the wet sand where the wave had left them. Leaving the ruin of Ellen's belongings in torn shreds, it moved slowly towards them.

"Re-Reece," Ellen said. She was pressed close to him, shivering.

Reece didn't have the time to appreciate the contact of her skin against his. He wanted to say, this is what you were looking for, lady, but things weren't so cut and dried now. Ellen wasn't some nameless cipher anymore—just a part of a crowd that he could sneer at—and she wasn't just something he had the hots for either. She was a person, just like him. An individual. Someone he could actually relate to.

"Can—can't you stop it?" Ellen cried.

The booger was getting close now. Its sewer reek was strong enough to drown out the salty tang of the ocean. It was like something had died there on the beach and was now getting up and coming for them.

Stop it? Reece thought. Maybe the thing had been created out of his frustrated anger, the way Ellen's friend made out it could happen in that book of his, but Reece knew as sure as shit that he didn't control the booger.

Another wave came down upon them and Reece pushed at the sand so that it pulled them partway out from the shore on its way back out. Getting to his knees in the rimey water, he stood in front of Ellen so that he was between her and the booger. Could the sucker swim?

The booger hesitated at the water's edge. It lifted its paws fastidiously from the wet sand like a cat crossing a damp lawn and relief went through Reece. When another wave came in, the booger backstepped quickly out of its reach.

Ellen was leaning against him, face near his as she peered over his shoulder.

"It can't handle the water," Reece said. He turned his face to hers when

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she didn't say anything. Her clear eyes were open wide, gaze fixed on the booger. "Ellen . . . ?" he began.

"I can't believe that it's really there," she said finally in a small voice.

"But you're the one—you said . . . " He drew a little away from her so that he could see her better.

"I know what I said," Ellen replied. She hugged herself, trembling at the stir of dark wings inside her. "It's just . . . I *wanted* to believe, but . . . wanting to and having it be real . . . " There was a pressure in the center of her chest now, like something inside pushing to get out. "I . . . "

The pain lanced sharp and sudden. She heard Reece gasp. Looking down, she saw what he had seen, a bird's head poking gossamer from between her breasts. It was a dark smudge against the white of her swimsuit, not one of Uncle Dobbin's parrots, but a crow's head, with eyes like the pair she'd seen looking back at her from the mirror. Her own magic, leaving her because she didn't believe. Because she couldn't believe, but—

It didn't make sense. She'd always believed. And now, with Reece's booger standing there on the shore, how could she help *but* believe?

The booger howled then, as though to underscore her thoughts. She looked to the shore and saw it stepping into the waves, crying out at the pain of the salt water on its flesh, but determined to get at them. To get at her. Reece's magic, given life. While her own magic . . . She pressed at the half-formed crow coming from her chest, trying to force it back in.

"I believe, I believe," she muttered through clenched teeth. But just like Uncle Dobbin's assistant in Christy's story, she could feel that swelling ache of loss rise up in her. She turned despairing eyes to Reece.

She didn't need a light to see the horror in his eyes—horror at the booger's approach, at the crow's head sticking out of her chest. But he didn't draw away from her. Instead, he reached out and caught hold of her shoulders.

"Stop fighting it!" he cried.

"But—"

He shot a glance shoreward. They were bracing themselves against the waves, but a large swell had just caught the booger and sent it howling back to shore in a tumble of limbs.

"It was your needing proof," he said. "Your needing to see the booger, to know that it's real—that's what's making you lose it. Stop trying so hard."

"I . . . "

But she knew he was right. She pulled free of him and looked towards the shore where the booger was struggling to its feet. The creature made rattling sounds deep in its throat as it started out for them again. It was

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hard, hard to do, but she let her hands fall free. The pain in her chest was a fire, the aching loss building to a crescendo. But she closed herself to it, closed her eyes, willed herself to stand relaxed.

Instead of fighting, she remembered. Balloon Men spinning down the beach. Christy's gnome, riding his pig along the pier. Bramley Dapple's advice. Goon pinching Jilly Coppercorn's leg. The thing that fed on eggs and eyeballs and, yes, Reece's booger too. Uncle Dobbin and his parrots and Nori Wert watching her magic fly free. And always the Balloon Men, tumbling end-over-end, across the beach, or down the alleyway behind her house . . .

And the pain eased. The ache loosened, faded.

"Jesus," she heard Reece say softly.

She opened her eyes and looked to where he was looking. The booger had turned from the sea and was fleeing as a crowd of Balloon Men came bouncing down the shore, great round roly-poly shapes, turning end-over-end, laughing and giggling, a chorus of small deep voices. There was salt in her eyes and it wasn't from the ocean's brine. Her tears ran down her cheeks and she felt herself grinning like a fool.

The Balloon Men chased Reece's booger up one end of the beach and then back the other way until the creature finally made a stand. Howling it waited for them to come, but before the first bouncing round shape reached it, the booger began to fade away.

Ellen turned to Reece and knew he had tears in his own eyes, but the good feeling was too strong for him to do anything but grin right back at her. The booger had died with the last of his anger. She reached out a hand to him and he took it in one of his own. Joined so, they made their way to the shore where they were surrounded by riotous Balloon Men until the bouncing shapes finally faded and then there were just the two of them standing there.

Ellen's heart beat fast. When Reece let go her hand, she touched her chest and felt a stir of dark wings inside her, only they were settling in now, no longer striving to fly free. The wind came in from the ocean still, but it wasn't the same wind that the Balloon Men rode.

"I guess it's not all bullshit," Reece said softly.

Ellen glanced at him.

He smiled as he explained. "Helping each other—getting along instead of fighting. Feels kind of good, you know?"

Ellen nodded. Her hand fell from her chest as the dark wings finally stilled.

"Your friend's story didn't say anything about crows," Reece said.

"Maybe we've all got different birds inside—different magics." She looked out across the waves to where the oil rigs lit the horizon.

"There's a flock of wild parrots up around Santa Ana," Reece said.

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"I've heard there's one up around San Pedro, too."

"Do you think . . .?" Reece began, but he let his words trail off. The waves came in and wet their feet.

"I don't know," Ellen said. She looked over at her shredded clothes. "Come on. Let's get back to my place and warm up."

Reece laid his jacket over her shoulders. He put on his T-shirt and jeans, then helped her gather up what was left of her belongings.

"I didn't mean for this to happen," he said, bundling up the torn blouse and skirt. He looked up to where she was standing over him. "But I couldn't control the booger."

"Maybe we're not supposed to."

"But *something like the booger . . .* "

She gave his Mohawk a friendly ruffle. "I think it just means that we've got be careful about what kind of vibes we put out."

Reece grimaced at her use of the word, but he nodded.

"It's either that," Ellen added, "or we let the magic fly free."

The same feathery stirring of wings that she felt moved in Reece. They both knew that that was something neither of them was likely to give up.

In Uncle Dobbin's Parrot Fair, Nori Wert turned away from the pair of cages that she'd been making ready.

"I guess we won't be needing these," she said.

Uncle Dobbin looked up from a slim collection of Victorian poetry and nodded. "You're learning fast," he said. He stuck the stem of his pipe in his mouth and fished about in his pocket for a match. "Maybe there's hope for you yet."

Nori felt her own magic stir inside her, back where it should be, but she didn't say anything to him in case she had to go away, now that the lesson was learned. She was too happy here. Next to catching some rays, there wasn't anywhere she'd rather be. ●

For the Lowentrouts of Seal Beach

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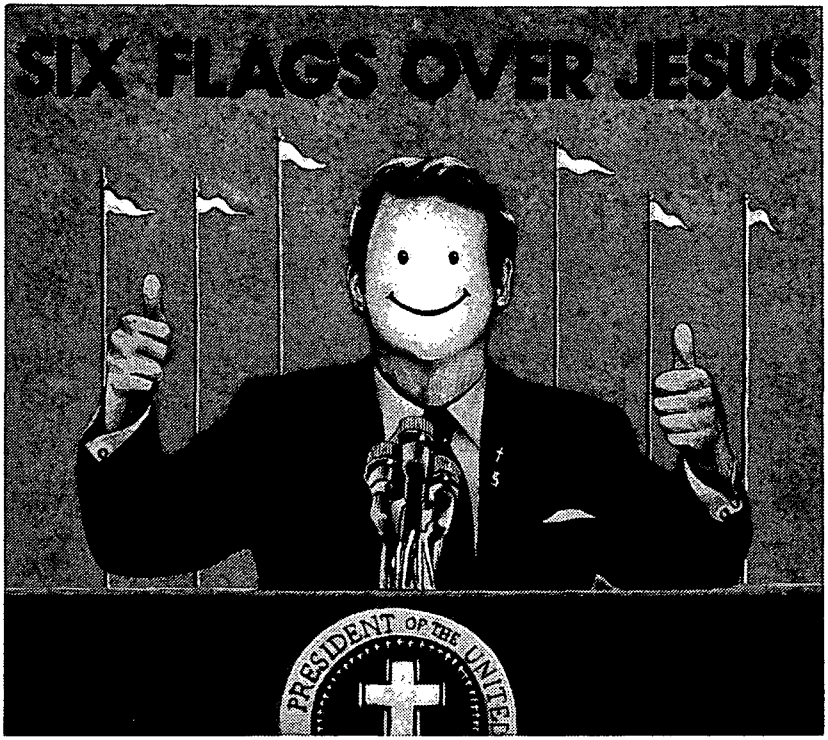

art: J.K. Potter

by Lewis and Edith Shiner

The authors' previous collaboration, "Things That Go Quack in the Night" (*IAsfm*, January 1983) has recently been reprinted as the cover story of our young adult anthology, *Tales from Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* (Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich).

Little Ronnie was surely much beloved of the Lord. He said grace before eating so much as a Snickers bar, washed his hands with soap after doing Number Two, and had a dog that looked more like Jesus every day.

For his thirteenth birthday Mom and Dad took him to Six Flags Over Jesus, halfway between Dallas and Fort Worth, right next to the Texas *Apostles* baseball stadium and the Lone Star Wax Museum of the Holy Land. They bought the tickets the very next day after he asked his older brother about the two lumps that were coming up under the T-shirt of little Phyllis down the street.

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* * *

The first thing you did when you got to the park was get on the Runaway Hell Train. It took you to Hell, where you got to dunk sinners in the sulpher tubs, drive locust bumper cars, and ride the Judge Baal Scream that did a 360 loop right over the edge of the Pit.

After Hell Ronnie ate hot dogs and cotton candy and drank a great big Dr. Pepper. Then he rode the Centrifugal Crucifixion Wheel, which was this big cylinder that went around so fast it pinned you to the crosses on the inside walls. It was not as much fun as Hell, and the kid next to Ronnie blew his beets and got some of it on Ronnie's shoes.

After that came Heaven. Ronnie knew he shouldn't feel this way, but he was afraid of Heaven. He wanted to go back to Hell and ride the River Styx boat ride again, past the frozen bodies of all the sinners doing the stuff that got them sent there.

But Mom and Dad each took one of his hands and led him to the big gold-painted tower right next to I-30. They took the elevator right to the top, and little Ronnie started to cry. "How sweet," Mom said. She didn't know he was weeping with awful, nameless dread.

They brought him to a little room with a TV and a pair of Walkman headphones. Heaven, it turned out, was nothing but watching TV. Ronnie sat down in the stuffed chair and his parents went away.

It wasn't like any TV show Ronnie had ever seen. The music was weird, and it sounded like people were saying things backwards in it. It got sweet for a little bit then very ugly, with screams and roaring and stuff.

Most of the pictures went by so fast he couldn't really see them, but they went by again and again. Bumps like little Phyllis had, only great *big* ones, with no T-shirt even, and then right after it a flash of a little boy Ronnie's age with razor blades or icepicks stuck in his eyes. Shots of a peepee all swollen up like little Ronnie's got sometimes, then quick flashes of people's hands that had been run over or burned with acid.

After a long time the pictures changed. There was happy music and lots of quick pictures of people praying and sitting around the dinner table in dark suits and plain dresses, and then a photograph of President Falwell shaking hands with Jesus. The violins came in and the chorus of voices rose up and the tears ran down Ronnie's face.

On the way home Dad said, "Feel better now, Ronnie?"

"Yes, Dad," Ronnie said.

"We'll come back next year, too," Mom said.

And then the best thing of all happened. A big truck swerved out of its lane and hit their car. They all three died and got to go to Heaven and live with Jesus that very night. ●

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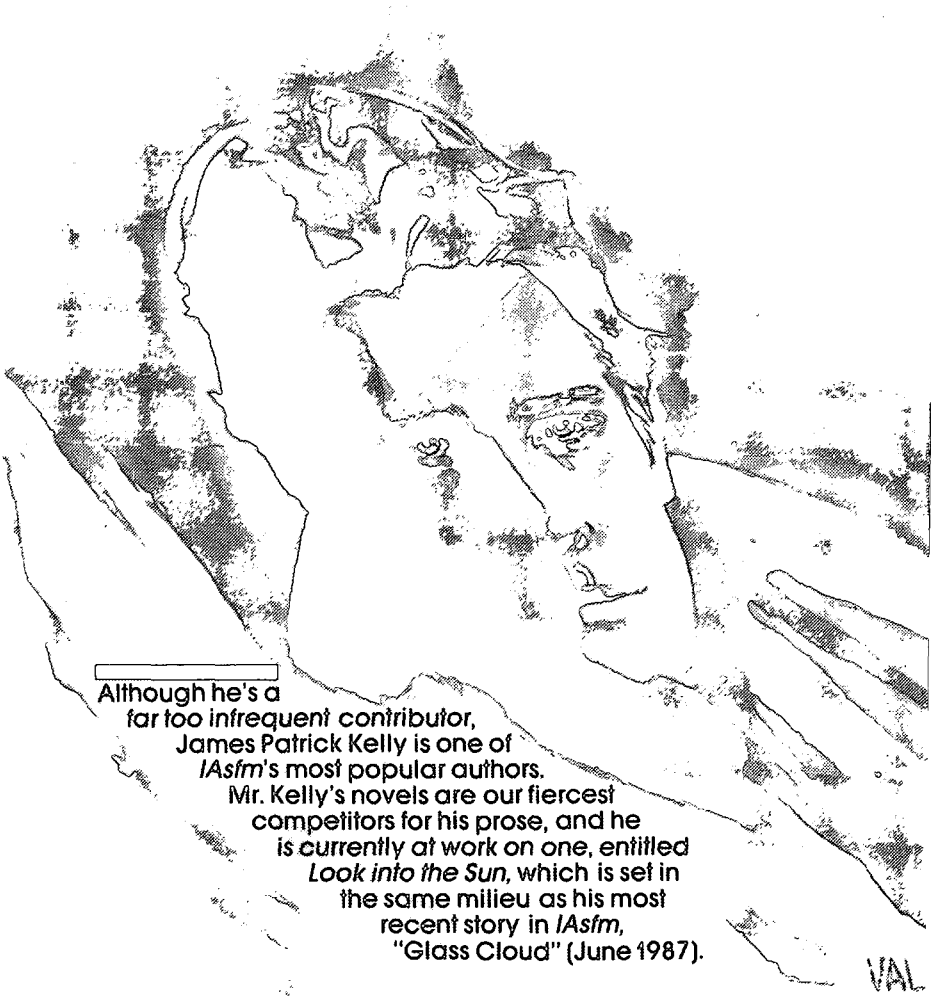
HEROICS

by James Patrick Kelly

art: Val Lakey Lindahn



Although he's a *far too infrequent contributor*, James Patrick Kelly is one of *IAsfm*'s most popular authors. Mr. Kelly's novels are our fiercest competitors for his prose, and he is currently at work on one, entitled *Look into the Sun*, which is set in the same milieu as his most recent story in *IAsfm*, "Glass Cloud" (June 1987).

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The kids were screaming. Two had climbed onto the Chris-Craft's foredeck and were doing a kind of panicky dance, as if the fiberglass had turned white-hot beneath their toes. Little kids: six, seven maybe—around Jamie's age. They were wearing the wrong size life preserver; the orange horseshoes came almost to their knees. There was an older boy amidships who didn't have a life preserver; Mike could see his bare back arch as he worked over something in the bottom of the boat. Smoke was billowing from the stern. A smudge on the summer sky.

Then Mike was running down the beach. The sand seemed to clutch at his feet; he wasn't going to get there in time. He had never seen a boat fire before. He didn't know if the thing could explode or not. Sure it could—why didn't they jump? And as soon as he thought it he heard himself call. "Jump! My God, *jump*!" The wind was swinging the bow away from shore and pushing the boat out toward the middle of the lake. Two old ladies in flowered housedresses ran to the end of the dock and stood by the empty boat hoist, and shrieked back at the kids. Their dresses billowed in the wind like the flames that had begun to lick at the black smoke. "Get off the boat." It sounded like someone else shouting; Mike had never heard such power in his voice. He felt distanced from himself, a little crazy. "*Jump now*!" The big kid finally stood up and staggered back against the wheel, holding his forearm to his head to shield himself. The fire reared up suddenly, big as an angry man. The flames snapped like a flag in the wind.

As Mike bounded from the beach onto the dock his foot went through a gray plank. He sprawled headlong; it felt like someone had taken a hammer to his shin. He got up immediately but the pain stayed with him—brought him back to himself. "Damn, damn, damn." He spoke the words as a kind of incantation against the pain as he hobbled down the dock toward the old ladies. He had an image of himself sprinting down the dock and diving off the end without breaking stride. He was not a big man, but he was in superb shape. He told himself he could still do it even as he slowed to a walk. He could smell the fire now, the bitter perfume of spilled gasoline. The old ladies were wailing like ghosts. *Save them, save them, save them.* The air at the end of the dock seemed to shimmer. He would have to burst through to get to the lake. He wasn't sure anymore. His leg stung. He looked down and saw that he was bleeding on a pair of brand-new Nikes. Not the cheap models he usually settled for but the top-of-the-line, air-cushioned racing shoes he had always wanted. *Save them, save them.* He sat down to take the Nikes off. One of the little kids toppled into the water. Mike knew he wasn't going to do anything. He hadn't expected to be afraid. He nodded at the frantic ghosts in their burning-plaid housedresses and heard himself say, "Call the fire department."

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He woke up. The bedroom was very still, as if someone had just stopped screaming. The bottom sheet on his side was damp with his sweat. Peg had rolled over to her side of the bed and taken the top sheet with her. He listened to her breathe for a while and then propped himself up on an elbow. The luminescent blue readout on the clock radio said 2:26 AM. In the next room Jamie whimpered in his sleep. Mike rolled out of bed to get his son a drink of water.

The clock read 5:33 when he finally decided that it was useless trying to sleep any more that night. He got up and put on a white shirt, jeans, white socks, and his gray $19.95 Nikes. He stuffed one of the ridiculous black bow ties into his shirt pocket and went down to make breakfast.

"You're up early this morning." Peg came up behind him while he was reading the baseball scores.

"Couldn't sleep."

"It's that spicy food." She poured herself a cup of coffee and sat down across the kitchen table from him. "I told you not to put too much red pepper in the chili." She picked up the comics section.

Mike grunted unhappily. Upstairs he could hear Jamie talking to himself about super-heroes in imitation adult voices.

"Want to hear your horoscope?"

He didn't answer.

" 'Remember that the way to achieve your secret ambitions is by planning. Start tonight. A relative has a message for you.' "

"Would you stop already?" He pushed away from the table. "It's goddamn voodoo. I don't want Jamie hearing that crap."

"You had a bad night, huh?" She was sympathetic now—too late to do him any good.

"Have to go." He clipped the bow tie to his collar. "See you tonight." They kissed.

"I love you, grouch," she said.

Secret ambitions. He had given up secret ambitions; he was thirty-nine years old and knew better. Mike was a high school biology teacher with a master's degree in education from State. He was at the top of the wage scale and, through creative scrimping, had never missed a mortgage payment or a VISA installment. He loved his wife, and his kid was happy and they lived year-round on a lake that tourists drove hours to visit. He had locked himself in and thrown away the key. Not that he didn't have ambitions, but they were modest and not at all secret. He wanted to win the masters' division in a 10K race someday and hoped to be able to afford a boat trip through the Grand Canyon before he died. He wanted Jamie to go to M.I.T. and maybe go into research, but he was realistic about what parents could expect from their children.

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Duffy was the one with ambitions. He seethed with ambition. He read too many books and wanted it understood that he had no intention of spending the rest of his life as manager of the four-aisle grocery his grandfather had founded. He was always telling Mike that they were living lives of quiet desperation, the two of them. Mike was always reminding Duffy that Thoreau was a trouble-making asshole who couldn't hold a steady job.

It was Duffy who had given him the summer job at Master's. Mike mostly worked the little grocery's meat and produce counters and stocked shelves, but he didn't mind bagging when things got hectic up front. It wasn't a bad way to spend the summer, although Peg said his hands smelled like chicken parts and he didn't much care for cleaning under the freezers or smiling at idiot customers and wise-ass kids. Still, he averaged around four thousand dollars for three months' work and that was the difference between living right on the lake and suffering back in the hills with the mosquitoes. If he had to listen to old Mrs. Matijczyk complain about teachers' salaries, he also got to be with Duffy. Even though Duffy was wrong at least half the time, he was Mike's best friend and had been since they had run together on the mile relay team that still held the state schoolboy record.

While they were in the back room, stripping the gummy outer leaves from a case of iceberg lettuce that had sat too long in the cooler, Mike told Duffy about the dream. He hadn't intended to mention the dream to anyone, but the memory of it had become an itch that he had to scratch. Better to tell Duffy than Peg, who would refer the case either to a gypsy or to Ann Landers.

Duffy considered. "How much you have to drink last night anyway?"

"Come on, Duff. Peg thinks it's pepper; you blame it on Schlitz. And what does that explain anyway?"

"I don't know what you want me to say."

Mike didn't know either. "Yeah, well, forget it then." He didn't know why he expected Duffy to understand when he didn't understand himself.

"Sometimes I feel guilty about not fighting in Nam." Duffy flicked some green off his shirt sleeve. "You know, like we never got to test our courage under fire?"

"Naah." Mike had reduced a rotting head to a worthless yellow heart the size of a tennis ball. He tossed it into the garbage and shrugged. "Sounds like warmed-over Hemingway to me."

For a while there was no sound except the soft squeak of lettuce being pulled apart.

"So maybe you're just a little afraid that you're a coward," Duffy said. "You've never been in serious danger, have you?"

"There was the time I spun out the Camaro."

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"I mean, there's nothing wrong with it. You can't know these things ahead of time. It just happens and you react. It's okay to wonder, I guess, but it's not worth an ulcer."

"I feel strange." Mike shook his head and then rummaged through the compost in the bottom of the soggy cardboard case. The speaker above them crackled and they heard Marge the cashier say "Tom Duffy to the front please. Tom."

Mike shrugged. "I think we got them all."

"Okay. Wrap them and get them out there before they start to stink again. Thirty-nine a head."

"You going to testify at my commitment hearing?"

"Tell you what." Duffy patted him on the shoulder. "I've got a twenty in my wallet that says you'll be a hero someday. I still remember that time you got tripped in the 880 and you got up and won the goddamn race. That took guts. So if you want to bet against yourself, I'll take your money." He reached for his back pocket. "Standing bet, what do you say?"

Mike smiled. He hadn't thought about that race in a long time. The State meet—as he closed on the tape it had been like the headlong, triumphant, heart-bursting finale of a symphony. "Get out of here," he said, giving Duffy a friendly shove, "or I'll report you to the Commissioner. There are laws about corrupting young athletes."

"You haven't been young since the Eisenhower administration," said Duffy as he pushed through the swinging doors.

That evening as Mike jogged, the race kept flashing at him like a beacon. He remembered all the little details, like the loose, crazy feeling he'd had when he'd gotten up, as if nothing mattered anymore. He saw the torn lining in Coach's sport coat, flapping as the old man jumped up and down like a freshman. There was Duffy running on the grass alongside the track, screaming at him. "Move on him! He's dead! Put out!" The rictus on Sanchez's face when he looked over his shoulder to see Mike behind him. The way he could feel his own eyes bulge, as if they might explode. He remembered thinking that he wasn't running anymore, he was falling inevitably toward the finish line like a suicide plunging toward the pavement. The tape was like a knife across his chest as he won and he doubled over, gaping at the bloody cinders stuck to the scrape on his knee. The cheers had straightened him up. Strangers had cheered for him; people were standing up. It had never happened before. Or since.

Mike had put Beethoven's Fifth in the Walkman. Flying with the music and his memory, he did his ten K course in 40:49:15, a personal best. The exhaustion afterward was sweet and clean, as if he had sweated out all the poisons that had accumulated within him that day. He felt so good that he took Jamie for a sunset swim. Peg watched from the porch. As he floated beside his son, he could feel the last vestige of doubt

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washing away. The water was warm; the sun was huge and red. A man would be a fool to expect more than this. The dream had relaxed its painful grip on his imagination. If it snuck up on him again, he was certain that he could run away from it.

There was nothing on TV but reruns so after they put Jamie to bed for the night Peg asked Mike to make love. Even that was good, perhaps because each wanted to make up for the morning spat. It would have been the perfect ending to the day had not Peg wanted to talk afterward. It was only 9:15, she said. Too early to sleep.

She asked him how his day had been and he said fine. She said he had looked tired at breakfast and why hadn't he slept well, and he said he was a little tired then and more tired now but he was fine. Fine. He thought she might take the hint but she didn't; he had to admit they really hadn't had a chance to talk in a while. She ran her hand up his belly and sifted his chest hair through her fingers and asked why was he so tired and did it have anything to do with her and he said no, it was only a nightmare he'd had and he didn't want to talk about it just now but maybe some other time. He kissed her then and meant it, too. There was a long silence. He lay on his back with his head sunk deep into his favorite down pillow and his other foam pillow under his bad back and tried to remember their last serious conversation. All that came to mind was TV and school and softball and jogging and the League of Women Voters and aerobics class and Jamie's swim team practice. So he told her he loved her and she said she knew it, and he asked her how her day had been.

"Betty and I went into town," Peg said. "She had to get her car inspected, and rather than have her sit all afternoon looking at old motorcycle magazines in the office at Bub's Shell, I said she could come with me down to the Sears to shop for new towels."

"What's wrong with the towels we have?"

"We got them from your sister as a wedding present, Mike. They're thirteen years old and they smell like sweat socks when they get wet, and two of them still have brown stains from the time you creosoted the porch. But I didn't see a set that I liked that we could afford. Anyway when we got done at Sears we called Bub, and he said another hour. We were going to hit Dunkin Donuts, but then Betty remembered that there's a palm reader just opened up in the trailer park so she wanted to check that out."

Mike groaned, pulled the foam pillow from under his back and covered his ears. Peg tickled him and when he protected himself she pulled the pillow away.

"It was very interesting and you have to listen."

"How much did it cost?"

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"Five. Betty paid."

Mike scowled at the thought of wasted money, even if it was Betty's. And he didn't much care to hear Peg talking about fortune-telling or astrology or any of that other nonsense; it bothered him that he could not tell how much of it she really believed.

"Well, she said that since I wouldn't take gas money and we weren't going to have time for donuts, she would treat. Anyway, it was very interesting and don't be such a poop. She said I had a very long lifeline."

"Betty or the gypsy?"

"She was from California. She said I would have three kids and two long and happy marriages." She chuckled.

"*Two*?"

"She said I would never be rich but that I would never have to worry about money."

"What do you mean two? How do you think that makes me feel?"

"She said that someone we knew was sick but wasn't telling, and that this little split line here means a funeral before the end of the year. We thought it might be Rose Concack; she's been looking a little gray lately."

"I'm either divorced or dead—and you're happy? For Christ's sake, Peg." He pulled at the blanket that they had kicked off while they were making love; he was chilled. "Sometimes I think you do these things just to annoy me."

"I'm sorry, Mikey. I thought it might make you laugh."

"Ha-ha. See you at the funeral." He moved to his side of the bed and turned his back to her. "Good night."

The explosion was louder than a starter's pistol, more like a shotgun going off in a living room. Something broke loose inside of Mike at the sound: he went a little crazy as he watched the kids clamber onto the foredeck. Their whimpers carried to him across the mirror-flat lake. Then he was down on the beach, trying to launch the eighteen-foot fossil skiff he had bought at a junkyard for twenty-three dollars. It had sat in the sand all summer, waiting for a motor that Mike couldn't afford, sat so long that the old lapstrake pine had sent roots down into the sand and now would not be moved. When he felt his back pop, Mike knew it was too late. The little kids were screaming and the big kid was struggling in the bottom of the burning Chris-Craft. Whatever the big kid was trying to do, he wasn't strong enough for it; he had a runner's upside-down build. "Forget it," Mike shouted. "*Jump.*" But although he could hear everything—the frantic drumming of tiny feet on the fiberglass deck, the big kid's panicky groans, even the hiss of melting plastic—they paid no attention to him. He was not that important. He had to run.

He flew down the beach; his feet never touched the ground. It was like

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falling. There was no choice. At any second a fireball could bloom on the stalk of smoke. Just like in a cop show, except that it wouldn't be stunt men in flame-suits faking agony. It would be those damned kids. About Jamie's age. "*Get off!*"

Rose Concack was already at the end of her dock, weeping and looking even more gray than usual. There was another woman with her whom Mike didn't recognize. They were wearing brightly flowered tents and he could see the varicose veins, dark as walnuts, bulging from their thick legs. They clutched at each other, weeping, scarcely able to stand upright; they were as heavy and old and useless as the skiff. Only Mike could save the kids. He stepped carefully from the beach onto the dock but that was a mistake. The momentum was gone, the crazy looseness. The warm air shimmered and congealed around him and he had to push through it. "*Save them, save them.*" Every time the women shrieked it seemed to get thicker until at last it was as if the dock was underwater. Except that he could still see the lake's mirror surface, stained with gasoline rainbows and the burning Chris-Craft and his own reflection. He looked at himself and wondered what he was waiting for. What did he want?

Jamie was reading the back of a box of G.I. Joe Action Stars and spooning up a second helping of the cereal. Mike was scanning the want ads for used outboard motors. He was hoping to find an old Merc for under thirty dollars, something he could maintain himself. Peg hadn't gotten out of bed yet which meant either that she was tired or still miffed about last night. Either way, her problem.

"Who do you think is stronger, Dad: Spider-Man or Superman?"

"I have no idea."

Jamie chewed for a moment. As usual, nobody was selling what Mike wanted to buy. "Remember that part in the movie," Jamie said, "when he caught the jet before it crashed?"

He re-folded the paper. "Who?"

"Superman. That's why I think that he must be stronger. But I still like Spidey better."

"Yeah?" Mike clipped on his bow tie. He hated bow ties; only clowns and grocery store workers wore bow ties.

"Yeah, he's braver. Because like if a bad guy shoots him, he really bleeds. But nothing can hurt Superman except Kryptonite and there isn't that much of it, except in space."

Mike stared at him and Jamie shrank back in his chair. Jamie had a milk mustache and there was no trace of guile in his widening eyes. There was no way his son could know about the dream or understand why his casual observation had exploded Mike's comfortable early-morning muddle. Mike wasn't sure himself; all he knew was that he didn't

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want to think about the qualities of courage anymore. "Yeah, well, I guess you're right." Mike's voice felt strange in his throat. "I've got to go to work now," he said, even though it wasn't really time. He felt shaky and he didn't want to scare the boy. "Tell Mom I'll be home at five." He kissed his son quickly.

"But I think *you're* bravest of all." Jamie seemed to sense that he had said something wrong; he was only trying to make up. "Because you don't have super powers."

"Gotta go, Jamie." Mike stuck a trembling hand in his pocket, pretending to look for his keys. "I love you," he said, and rushed out the door.

He parked the car in the empty parking lot of the public beach, and sat watching waves lap against the diving dock. He had always believed the world was rational; he had always thought himself the sanest man in it. Now he wasn't so sure about either. It took him a long time to reconstruct his composure, and even then it was a rickety and uncertain job. He told himself that his problem was nine-tenths exhaustion and one-tenth imagination. Too much thinking, not enough sleep. Duffy didn't say anything when he showed up for work half an hour late.

Duffy didn't say much to him all that day and Mike had the impression his friend was avoiding him. But at four-thirty he came out of his tiny office as Mike was punching out. Duffy pulled his own card from the rack and stuck it into the time clock.

"Knocking off early?" said Mike.

He put a hand on Mike's shoulder. "Let me buy you a brew."

"What the hell for?" Mike wondered how mad Peg would get.

"I ain't telling." Duffy aimed him at the door. "Yet."

They settled into a window booth at the Swan Dive across Summer Street from Master's. Duffy ordered a pitcher of Schlitz and Mike made a crack about their beer bellies. Duffy just smiled as if he had a winning lottery ticket in his pocket. He had long since stopped working out and drank more than was good for a man going to fat. He wouldn't say anything until Marcie brought the pitcher, then he filled each of their glasses and then held his up, saluting Master's through the glass. "Goodbye and good riddance," he said. "I'm moving to New Hampshire, Mike. To seek my fortune."

"Shit," Mike said. Then he forced a smile.

They touched glasses and then chugged their beers; Mike poured refills. "New *Hampshire*?"

"They got what they call the Golden Triangle there, fastest growing area in the country. Population's going to double in the next twenty years, easy. You remember my cousin Ed was out here last spring? He has three convenience stores near Nashua. Calls them ShortStops. Bas-

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ically all they carry is dairy, bread, beer, soda, smokes. He does a huge volume and he's talking six new locations by next year. I get three."

"Your own little chain."

"Yep. Ed's going to give me the crash course and then we're going to be partners. He says he wanted someone he could trust. Of course I've got to put up some serious money of my own. But hey, it's like Coach always used to say: No guts, no glory."

They drank to Coach and his philosophy. Mike drained his glass and poured another.

Duffy leaned across the table and lowered his voice. "Truth is, it's past time for me to leave. Master's is hurting; everybody shops at the new IGA out by Sears and I don't blame them. You can park there and the produce doesn't smell. I've found a buyer who thinks he can make a go of it, and good luck to him. I've got his promise to keep everyone on. You especially."

Mike sighed and stared at the golden bubbles bursting in his beer.

"Hey, Mike, it's not like I've been keeping it a secret. I've been looking ever since the divorce, you know that. What do I need to stay around here for? I mean you, you've got a family, a good job. You're happy."

Silence.

"I haven't told anyone yet. Keep my secret until tomorrow?"

Mike nodded. Duffy emptied the pitcher. "Aren't you going to congratulate me?"

Mike extended a hand across the table and they shook. "I'm going to miss you, you son-of-a-bitch." He didn't feel the tear until it dribbled down his cheek.

Duffy's eyes were watery too. "Truth is, Mike, you're about the only thing I'm going to miss in this town."

They sat for a while not looking at each other. Mike read the sale posters on Master's windows as if they might explain it all. "Diet Coke 6/$1.99. Eggs Ex. Large $1.15." Not much of a sale, which was why Peg mostly shopped at the IGA. Both men seemed a little embarrassed at how easily their emotions had surfaced. They finished their beers. Duffy wouldn't let Mike pay. They went home.

Peg was grim when Mike walked in the door. He was an hour and a half late for dinner and he felt as brittle as stale bread.

"Didn't you tell Jamie five?" She sounded like a divorce lawyer.

"I'm sorry." A fight was the last thing he needed. "Duffy's moving to New Hampshire."

The hard stare softened. "Oh, Mike." Then she hugged him and Mike let himself sag in her embrace. He was surprised at how quickly she understood and he was grateful. But then she always seemed to get stronger when he was at his weakest.

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"He's going to manage convenience stores. He's happy." Peg's hair was damp; it smelled like lavender. Mike ran his fingers through it, remembering how smooth it had been when they were first married. "I guess it's bad news for me, though."

"For us."

He nodded.

"What are you going to do?"

He kissed her. "Is it okay if I run?"

She smiled. "Sure, go ahead. It's only stew; I turned it down an hour ago."

He was pulling on his Nikes when the Concacks' boat exploded. It was an impossible sound: a window-rattling thunderclap on a clear day. The sound of a nightmare. He bounded out to the porch and saw it all. The yellow Chris-Craft skewed slowly off course like a bird wounded in flight. A thin plume of gray smoke thickened and turned oily black. The fiberglass engine cowling had been blown out of the boat by the force of the explosion and was floating toward shore. Two kids in orange life vests climbed onto the foredeck. Mike froze, trying to will the cowling back over the inboard-outboard, the boat back on course. The kids started to scream.

There were a couple of inches of brown water in the bottom of the skiff. Mike got behind it and pushed. His feet dug into the sand; it was like trying to move a dead horse. The old wooden boat scraped painfully across the beach. He felt the sand suck one of his Nikes off and the bow broke the mirror surface of the lake. He sprawled headlong as the skiff shot ahead, floating free. As he picked himself up he had the crazy feeling that he could do anything. He splashed alongside, heaved himself aboard and fitted the oars into the oarlocks. He pulled for the burning boat, craning over his shoulder to see the first flames climbing the column of smoke.

"*Jump. It's going to blow*!" He was close now, close enough to smell the gasoline rainbows that stained his beautiful lake. The little kids held out their arms, as if they wanted to hug him. The big kid looked up as the skiff thumped against the port side of the Chris-Craft. The fire was all the colors of sunset. There was a man lying face down in the bottom of the burning boat, a bald old man with a bloody scrape on the side of his head. The big kid whimpered as he tried to sit the old man up. "Come on, Grandpa, you gotta, you gotta." Grandpa was blue-white and limp as a dissection frog.

"Can you swim, kid?" Mike stood up on the midships seat of the skiff and grabbed the Chris-Craft's gunwale.

"He's hurt." The big kid looked about thirteen. Scrawny but with the

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long thighs of a sprinter. He had the same homemade crewcut that Mike's dad used to give him in the summertime.

"Get the kids ashore. Understand?" Mike straddled the two boats. The big kid hesitated and all Mike could see in his eyes was white. "I'll take care of him." Mike lowered his voice, trying to make him believe that they were two of a kind—if Mike could do it then the kid could too. "I've got him; you take them. Okay?" He made it sound like a locker room dare. The big kid nodded and backed away, shielding his eyes from the flames. He clambered up next to the little kids and they stopped screaming as he took their hands. They all jumped and Mike stood—one foot on each boat, holding them together—and watched until they surfaced. The big kid grabbed the little ones by the life vests and began to tow them toward the dock. It was less than fifty yards; they'd make it. No problem. Mike was so loose he felt like laughing. He could hear the hiss of melting plastic as he stepped over to the Chris-Craft; the fire burned his face like a fever.

He grabbed the old man under the armpits and dragged him to the port side. The skiff was drifting away and he had to drape the body over the rail while he hung himself overboard and stretched his stockinged foot out. His toes curled over a cleat and he pulled the skiff back toward them. As he picked Grandpa up the old man opened his eyes and moaned, "No insurance."

He did laugh then. "Me neither," he said as he lifted the old man over the side and lowered him into the skiff. Mike had to drop him the last few inches and he slumped to the bottom. The skiff slued away.

Mike stood high on the Chris-Craft's gunwale and poised himself to jump into the water. He could see Peg at the end of Concack's dock pulling the little kids out of the lake. He could see the big kid—brave kid—churning through the water back toward the boats. He could see two old ladies capering on the dock, cheering for him. He was standing at the top of a mountain of adrenalin and thought he could see everything. He didn't ever want to come down.

"Now, Mister." The big kid was below him, treading water. "*Jump.*"

Mike did not move. The kid heaved himself up onto the gunwale beside the engine and grabbed at Mike's ankle. The boat shuddered; Mike twisted, losing his balance. He saw a ball of flame boiling out of the ruined engine and then he was falling. The water slapped him out of his nightmare. As he came up for air his chest was tight with fear; he thought he might vomit. He had been crazy to take such a risk. Crazy. But he was all right now. It was over. He had proved whatever there was to prove.

His foot nudged something and he turned to see the big kid's back break surface. A stain was spreading slowly across the lake. ●

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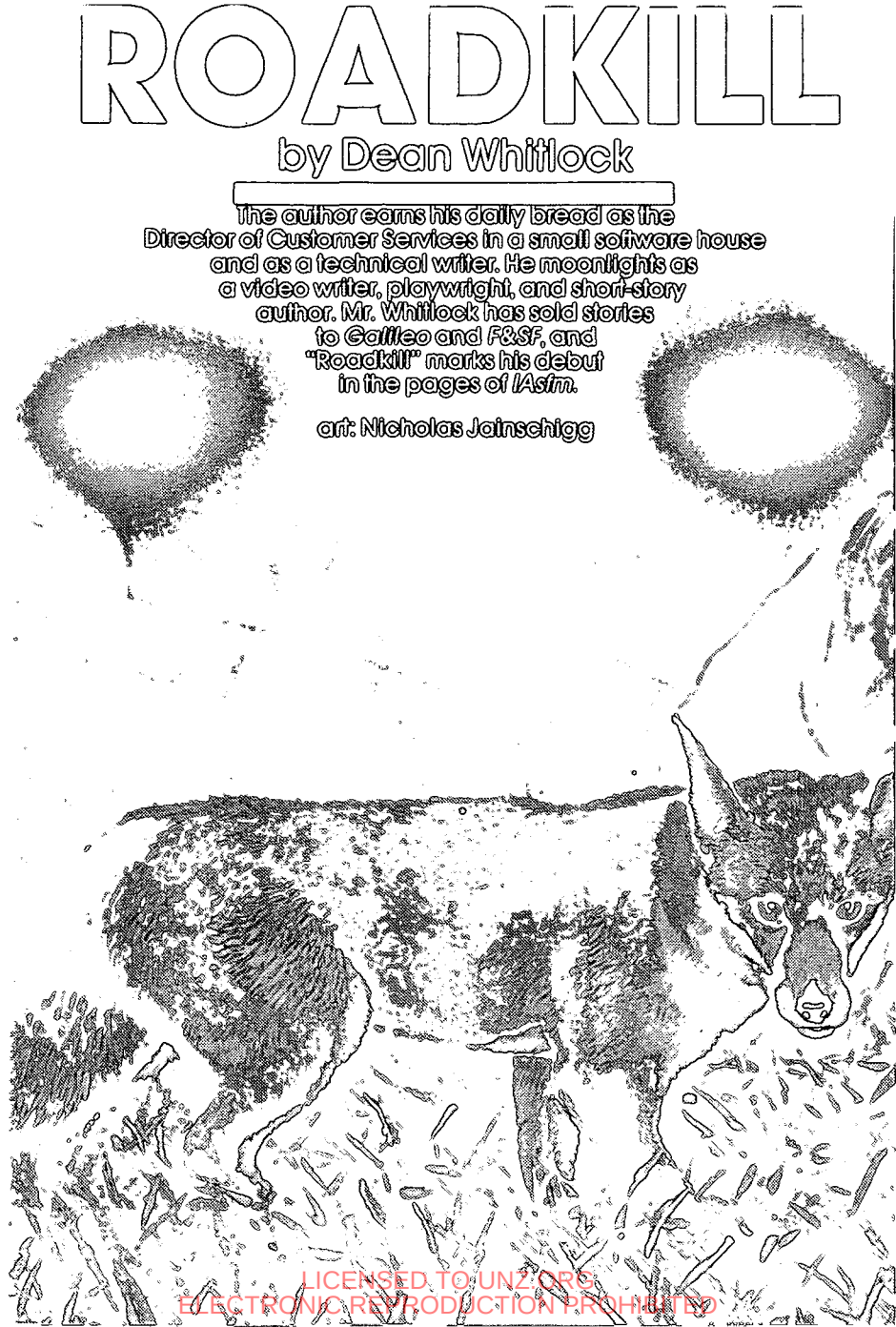
ROADKILL

by Dean Whitlock

The author earns his daily bread as the Director of Customer Services in a small software house and as a technical writer. He moonlights as a video writer, playwright, and short-story author. Mr. Whitlock has sold stories to *Galileo* and *F&SF*, and "Roadkill" marks his debut in the pages of *IAsfm*.

art: Nicholas Jainschigg



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I remember it was Bun who first saw the fox, sitting by the road in the early dawn there. I don't think he ever saw the woman, not even at the end in the woods. But he saw the fox first, sure enough.

We were cruising up to Coolidge Center on Route 184 in his old pick-up, the gray one, with double lids on the muffler and the red fogs on dim, about as quiet as you can be with internal combustion. I was looking out the side window into Ed Thurston's field just then to see what might be moving when I heard Bun shift down and crank it. Man, that truck could jump.

I quick looked over and he had a mean grin on his face like he had seen something fancy and was just about to bag it, no miss. He swerved across the center line and onto the left shoulder, kicking up stones and road salt with the balloon tires, me flopping in the seat like a bag of groceries. I got a grip on the dash and looked out, and there it was, sleek and glossy, shining in the red lights, its eyes frozen on us. I knew we had a good one. Bun gave that sharp laugh of his and shifted up and went on that fox.

And damn if it didn't grin back and waltz right out from under those big tires across the road and into the field. You never heard a man curse like Bun did then. He swung the wheel at it, but, hell, that truck was no sports car. We went past going sideways in the gravel and, I tell you, I was suddenly a lot more worried about maple trees by the roadside than that old fox.

We came to a stop with a jerk that rattled my teeth, and Bun gunned it back up the road to where we'd seen it go into the field, but you know how it is. No sign of the fox. Bun and I got out with a light and looked for tracks, but you can't expect too much that time of year—end of March. What snow's left is too grainy, and the ground showing is either too wet or too hard. Bun did a little more swearing and I think would have gone across the field to the woods to look for signs there. Foxes were that special. But just then we saw lights down the road.

"Oh, shit," Bun said. "Four damn A.M. you can bet it ain't the parson."

And he was right. We jumped back in the truck, got the lids off and the lights on, and were cruising legally down the right side of the road when the green lights came on behind us. Fish and Wildlife, on the prowl. Bun looked at me and took it out of gear. The flashing green light made his face look longer and his eyes deeper. He was not in the best of moods.

Well, it was Warden Bill Tulley, all right, Frag and Wag Department, at your service. He marched up and leaned in the window, never a smile.

"Okay, Bun," he said, "let's see what you've got. You, too, Pete."

"Why, two nice skunks, Mr. Tulley," Bun said, leaning on the mister. "All tagged, and flat as your chest. They're in the back."

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Tulley aimed his light into the box, and there they were, stinking like only roadkills can. He could see the tags clipped to their ears.

"One's mine, Bill," I said to him. "In case you're wondering."

He didn't answer. He actually reached into the box and lifted the skunks, checking the tags. Careful man, Bill Tulley. Or no smell left after chasing roaders for so long. He came back up by the window.

"Pop the hood, Bun," he said.

"Gonna check my oil?" Bun said back.

"Just open it," he said.

Bun smiled and pulled the handle and Tulley went up front and lifted the hood. The light went down in, making funny shadows on the windshield. Bun's smile went real tight. He laid his hand on the gear shift.

"Bun," I said. "That ain't no fox."

"More like a weasel," he said. He slid it into first.

The gearbox had more mud than oil in it by then. It gave a clunk and the truck hopped about six inches. Tulley came out from under that hood like a man with a bad case of trots, sort of bent over and ready to jump for the bushes, and Bun laughed that sharp laugh. Tulley straightened up and walked back, kinda stiff legged, and leaned in the window again. My side this time. He had a stick in his hand, about two feet long, with a handle at one end and a big stain at the other. Bun smiled at him and he glared back, the green light flashing in both their eyes, and I started feeling kinda warm there between them.

"Found this club under the hood, Bun," he said.

"Well, why don't you put it back."

"You want to tell me what it's for?"

"Can't start this thing without it, Mister Tulley. Cold mornings, I got to wang the starter three or four times before she'll turn over."

"It's got some pretty interesting stains on it, Bun."

Bun kept smiling. "Motor oil."

Tulley narrowed his eyes and looked sideways at me.

I just shrugged.

"Pete," he said, "you ought to find better things to do with your time. And better people to do them with."

Then he went back to his cruiser and went on up the road. Took the club with him. Left the hood up, too.

Well, Bun slammed the door open and stomped around to shut it, kicking stones and the tires, too. Then he stomped back, and half in the door he froze, staring out past me into the field. I looked around, and there was that fox, sitting on its haunches, tongue hanging out in a little smile, just watching. Then it kinda nodded its head and ran right behind the truck and loped off into the woods.

Bun ran after it to the edge of the road, cursing into the dark, and

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that's when I first saw the woman. I think. I mean, I saw something tall and white standing in the field where the fox had been. Tall, and curved like a woman. But when I looked closer, it was gone, quick as the fox. There was just a little poplar sapling standing in the dead grass. Then I wasn't sure I'd seen anything.

Well, not much to say for that night. We didn't have but two skunks to show for six hours roading, and not very good ones at that. Then Bill Tulley went and found the club. And then there was the fox. Nobody likes getting laughed at, least of all Bun. Least of all by some animal.

It was coming on day, so we went on over to the interstate, Bun stewing about Tulley and the fox. When he's mad like that, his jaw muscles work back and forth. I'd learned not to say anything then. Not much I could say. I mean, Tulley was an asshole, but he was my brother-in-law. Funny thing is, Bun's my brother-in-law, too. Tulley married my sister Dora, and Bun married my sister Darlene, which makes them brothers about twice removed. With me caught in the middle. It kinda makes for some interesting conversations at Christmas and Thanksgiving, I can tell you. I try not to take sides too much, but, hell, I've been roading with Bun since school.

Our granddads used to take fur together, too. Only they went trapping, the way it was done all over before the Greens got into the White House and put the ban on the fur trade. I tell you, they had a fight over it, too. Still do up here from folks that don't listen to the law. I remember, they shut it down completely at first. Cut out the imports and the manufacturing and everything. Well, that didn't last long. I think I was seven when the first ban went in and maybe nine when it went out. Just too many people like a fur coat, is all, or at least a touch of fur at the collar. Besides, jacking fur is as easy as jacking deer, and a lot of people in Canada were still buying.

So they let people go back to making the coats. But where's the fur gonna come from, people asked. You want furs, you gotta trap them. No way, they said. Only the ones that die naturally. Roadkills. People want furs, fine. Pick them up off the road. They'd just go to waste, otherwise.

And, damn, if they didn't make that one stick. Of course, some folks have gone into farming. Rabbits, chinchillas, even minks will take to that without too much trouble. Rabbit the most, of course. I mean, you can't give away a roadkill rabbit. But even mink isn't worth what it used to be.

So we take raccoon, woodchuck, squirrel, skunk. Lots of skunk. Of course, nobody ever bought a skunk coat. Hudson Sable, on the other hand, is real popular. That's made from the black fur. Then there's Musk Ermine, from the white fur. And there's Golden Marmot from woodchucks

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and Silver Marten from squirrels. There's a good price on squirrel fur. A coat takes a lot of them, and they're getting scarce, too.

Not that anyone makes a living at it. Not that many did before the ban, anyway. Now, most folks just do it for the sport. It just don't pay the time or tires, even when you get a good fur. And you don't see the good fur anymore. Beaver, otter, fisher, you just don't find them on the road. Or in the woods. Fox either. That's what got Bun so upset. That fox was worth a month of skunks.

We went up and down the interstate, but it was clean. Spring is usually a good time, and that was the first day of spring. Sort of the official start of the season. I mean, you get skunks as early as February, and squirrels come out in March, but the other animals are pretty scarce until April. Summer's okay for quantity—lot of woodchuck in June—and Fall will give you the nicest pelts. Now, Winter's a lean season, and, Bun, he goes year-round. Roading is all he does, really, except for a little logging for his dad. He's one of the few. And he's good at it. He doesn't even use live traps, like some. Yeah, two skunks is a real bad night for Bun, particularly with one of them mine.

He didn't say one word the whole time we were cruising the interstate, just looked out the window, his eyes shifting back and forth watching the edges of the road and up on the hills to the edge of the woods, looking for fur. But his jaw kept working, and I could tell he was chewing over the night. I figured it was Tulley that had him going the most. After all, foxes stick to their territory. Sooner or later, Bun'd flatten that little red grin right into the asphalt. So I figured it was Tulley who'd better watch out.

And I kinda forgot about the whole thing anyway when we got near home, because Bun spotted a skunk crossing the road ahead of us and that was it. It was broad daylight by then, but he switched on the high-beams and the red foggers and floored it. The old Chevy clunked and took off and that old skunk turned and looked at us like it could not believe its eyes. Then wham, thump, Bun took it dead center on both tires and it was Hudson Sable. A clean kill, too. Didn't even need the club. He was smiling again when he tagged it and threw it in the back with the other two. You can always tell a roader by the way his truck smells. The best roaders smell the worst, and Bun, well, he was in a class by himself.

Now, me, I do it more as a hobby. I drive the town truck and the bucket loader, which keeps me on the roads at most hours of the day or night, plowing and sanding in the winter, digging and mowing in the summer. My work takes me right by the fur anyway, so I get my license every year. I don't carry a club like Bun, though. I don't aim. I can't say as I dodge, either. I just take what Chance puts in front of me.

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Anyway, it's a hobby with me, like with most, so I didn't really notice when the pickings got slim. Bun noticed, though, and he came up with one damn fool notion as to why. But I better go back a bit first, back to March there where we first saw the fox. You see, I was wrong about Bun and Tulley. I mean, Bun didn't really give squat for that club, or for Tulley either. But he gave a lot for that fox.

The next day, he started scouting Thurston's field, looking for sign where it met the woods, looking for places where the fox would go across it to the road. Bun was good at tracking. Not like some who just stick out a live trap and then dump the fur in a burlap sack and back over it. Bun had pride in his roading, despite what Tulley thought. I figure he probably had every animal run within two miles spotted in the first day. Then it was just a matter of watching and waiting and keeping an eye out for fresh sign.

The problem with that is, a roader can't afford to sit too still too long. If he's gonna make an honest go at it, he's got to cruise a bit, checking all the roads and all the likely places where cars go too fast. And then there was Bill Tulley. Bun may have been able to ignore Tulley, but no way Tulley would ignore Bun. When he found Bun sitting, he moved him along.

It got to be a bit funny at first. Bun'd sit at twilight watching by the field. Then Tulley would come along and move him out. So Bun'd go around his usual circuit, looking for fur, always coming back by the field a time or two and always sure to be there at dawn. And Tulley would cruise around his own circuit, doing whatever he did and always coming back to Thurston's field just about dawn. You could've set your watch by them boys.

I didn't get out with Bun any that month, so I didn't pay it much mind when the fur dried up, but for him it was a matter of income. Or no income, I should say. It got so two or three nights would go by with no roadkills at all. And it wasn't just Bun. Everybody felt it. Even the jackers with their traps and sacks. There just weren't any fur on the road.

By the end of April, Bun had a funny look in his eye. All that time and no clear run at the fox, just a flash of the moon on its tail as it disappeared into the brush. No woodchuck either, or even skunk. Bun took to cruising faster, gunning down leaves blowing across the road. Getting out earlier and coming home later and stopping by the field in broad daylight to watch.

And Tulley, who should've been grinning like a coon at the noticeable lack of flat fur, damn if he didn't get meaner, hounding after Bun like Bun was hounding after that fox. Bun lost weight, and Tulley put it on.

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It was like water seeking its own level, you know. Two snakes feeding on each other.

Well, I kinda got caught in the middle the first of May. It was a weekend night, and I hadn't been out much in April, so I thought I'd head over to Bun's in the evening. Bun and Darlene live in a mobile home out behind his dad's place. I pulled around the barn into their dooryard and there was Tulley's cruiser sitting by the stoop with Tulley himself in it. Dora and Darlene were saying good-byes at the door, trying to collect all of Dora's kids without stepping on any of Darlene's cats.

Hard to believe they're sisters, those two. Darlene's tall and hefty and light-haired like Dad, and Dora's small and round and dark-haired like Mom. Darlene's a full-time nurse raising a dozen or so cats and chickens, and Dora's a full-time mother raising a flock of kids. Darlene married skinny little dark-haired Bun, and Dora took big, blond Tulley. I think they each liked the other so much they married someone who looked like her. Nature may make stranger couples, but I haven't seen them.

It was getting on to twilight, but Bun's truck was still there in the yard. I parked next to it and got out and said hello to everyone. Tulley, too. After all, he was my brother-in-law. Dora's youngest and Darlene's oldest crawled over, and I picked one up in each arm. The young one drooled on me and the old one nuzzled my face and purred. Then Bun slammed out the door past Darlene and Dora and over to his truck.

"How's the roads?" I asked him, not knowing then about how things were.

He looked over at Tulley and then back at me. "Been better," he said finally.

"Can't be for not trying," Tulley said kinda casually from his car.

Bun looked at him. "That supposed to mean something?" he asked. I kinda wished I'd asked about the weather.

"A man of your ability usually knows how to find fur when he needs it," Tulley said.

"That's right, he does," Darlene said, coming to the rescue from the doorway. "But right now, nobody's finding fur, are they, Pete?" I knew she was trying to cool things down, but I just stood there and looked dumb.

"Well I'm not sad they're not finding any poor animals squashed on the road," Dora said. Like Bun, Dora didn't always know when to leave something alone. "I mean, no offense, Bun, but I think the fur looks a lot better on the animal than it does on some flatlander."

"You gonna stop wearing leather shoes?" Bun asked her. "Or your fleece-lined booties in the wintertime?"

"It's not the same," Dora said, talking like she would to her youngest. "Cows and sheep are raised for that."

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"Cows and sheep aren't endangered," Tulley put in. The Frag & Wag party line.

"You think skunks are endangered, you ought to count how many come after our chickens," Bun told him. His jaw muscles were starting to work.

"I was thinking more of foxes," Tulley said. Bun and I both stared at him. "Ed Thurston tells me he's seen one on his farm."

Bun glared at him. "So?"

"So it seems to me that you've been spending an awful lot of time sitting by the road up there. You got your eye on that fox, Bun?"

"It ain't been hit, has it?"

"Not yet."

"Then I guess I can't have my eye on it, can I." Bun's look was totally mean. The old cat jumped down and left, and the baby looked like it wanted to.

"Let's just say you'd better not," Tulley replied. "Because I tell you, Bun, if you bring that fox to me with your tag in its ear, I'm gonna bust your ass, I don't care how many tire tracks you put in it."

Well, Bun's jaw was working so hard he could hardly talk.

"Then let me tell you, Mister Tulley," he said, "that fox has taken more fur away from me than you can count. If I ever see it in my headlights again, I'll run over you and anything else gets in my way."

Tulley was downright struck. That was the closest Bun'd ever come to admitting he didn't just pick up them roadkills. He leaned back in his car and shook his head.

"Bun," he said, "I think you must have picked up rabies from one of those coons you hit, because you are plumb crazy."

Bun opened his mouth, closed it, then turned around and slammed into his truck. I looked at Darlene. She was angry and worried and just about to cry, all in one.

"I'd better go with him," I said, handing the baby to Dora.

"Don't get mixed up with him, Pete," Tulley warned me.

"I'll just try to unmix him," I said.

Bun was already backing out of the dooryard, but I grabbed the handle and yanked the door open and jumped it. He swung it around and fired it out of there with me flapping in the breeze. The door slammed on my leg and left a bruise, but I got myself pulled in finally.

I asked him, "You want me to drive?"

He didn't even answer, just floored it down the road. So we cruised nowhere for an hour or so. Didn't see any fur either, flat or walking. Bun was tensed up like a dog before a thunderstorm, speeding up and slowing down and looking out into the fields more than he watched the road. I decided it'd be a good idea to use my seat belt.

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Finally I said to him, "What did you mean back there, Bun? About the fox taking your fur?"

He looked over at me and then looked back front. Started to say something. Stopped. Looked out the side window. Finally, he said, "He's protecting them."

"He's what?"

"He's protecting them." He looked at me again with that funny look. "Like a traffic cop or something. He keeps them from crossing the road when there's a car coming."

It took me a minute to catch that one.

"That's a pretty funny notion, Bun," I said when I had it straight. "You telling me that fox is helping the other animals cross the road?"

"Yeah."

"You mean, like skunks and squirrels?"

"Yeah."

"Foxes eat squirrels, Bun."

"Not this one."

I had to sit a minute on that idea, too.

Then I asked him, "You seen this?"

"What do you think? I'm making it up?"

"Well, I don't know. It's a pretty damn strange idea, that's all."

"You're telling me?" He laughed suddenly, and that was worse than his look.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"He's working for Tulley, that's what he's doing." Then he pounded his fist on the steering wheel. "Dammit, Pete, it ain't funny."

I held both hands up. "I ain't the one laughing, Bun."

He took us over to 184 by way of Butter Hill and came down on Thurston's place from the North. The road goes through the cut there where the river comes down by the road and swings away again and there's thick woods. That was a good place for coon and squirrel usually, but not for fox. They like open woods and fields. But Bun doused the lights and switched on the red foggers and put the lids on the muffler, and we eased through looking for eyes at the edge of the road. I kept looking for Tulley's green cruiser, too.

Well, we came out of the woods and through the fields and past the farm without seeing a thing, Bun driving real slow, hand on the gear shift, left leg almost shaking on the clutch. We came to the spot where we'd first seen the fox and then went on another mile or so. Still nothing. Then Bun turned her around and cruised back all the way through the cut. And turned her and cruised back by the farm. And turned her.

And after about two hours of that, my own legs were shaking and my eyes were falling out of my skull. When I shut them the inside of my

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head was as red as the roadway. I thought, it's no wonder Bun's got a funny look on his face. The damn fool's going blind. I started seeing things in the bushes then, shapes moving where there weren't anything but stones and fence posts. Shadows creeping toward the road from the woods. Bun and I were both twitching like horses in fly season.

Finally he was driving so slow I thought the old truck would reach up and turn itself off. We were in the cut then, coming back toward the farm, with the break where the fields started showing like smooth skin against the dark pine and fir. Bun let her glide to a stop on the shoulder, and we sat there waiting while the sky got lighter and the shadows darker. He cut the lights then and we waited for something to move.

When it did, I thought I was still seeing spooks, but Bun grabbed my leg so tight I knew something had to be real. I looked again and saw the fox walk right out into the road, no mistaking that silhouette. It had its nose up, scenting the air and listening. Bun didn't move, and I started to say something, but he shushed me and kept watching. The fox looked right at us, I thought, and then down the other way, and then trotted back the way it had come.

I turned to Bun, so het up from doing nothing I was about to explode. "Why the hell," I started to say, but he shushed me again and pointed his chin up the road. His hand tightened on the shift.

I looked and something came back out on the road, something low and lumbering with stubby legs. Then I made out it was a big, old skunk. It walked out right where the fox had gone in and didn't even bother to look up the road. A little tingle went up my spine, I tell you.

Bun let it get halfway across the road before he fired on the lights and gunned the truck at it. The old gray sucker just about popped a wheelie.

Well, the skunk look around and raised his tail, ready to take on a half-ton truck with its spray. But damn if that fox didn't run out on the road, nipping at its heels until it turned and humped for the shoulder. Then the fox looked back at us barreling down on it and took off down the road toward the field. And Bun, he went by the skunk like it wasn't even there.

He took the truck up through the gears until we were flying through the shadows there and gaining on that fox. And just when we were two beats from its tail, it cut sideways toward the open field. Bun swerved after it. He was totally quiet, hands clenched on the wheel. Me, I was cursing enough for both of us.

The fox hit the shoulder, leaped over the ditch and under the barbed wire onto the old stone wall along the field. And Bun followed him. The truck slid in the gravel and flew over the ditch, rattling like a can of nails when the front wheels hit on the other side. Then it bounced its back wheels in the ditch, plowed through the wire and rammed over the

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stones. The fox was off and running on a crazy path across the field and Bun tried to follow, but the ground was too soft and the suspension was too far gone. We came off the wall with the wheels turned and they dug into the field and round we went, ass over elbows.

I kinda ducked my head into my hands and watched the headlights flash around the field and the sky outside the windshield. Out of the corner of one eye I saw the window next to me pop in and shower my lap with little glass rocks. Out of the other corner I saw Bun hit my shoulder and then the roof and then his window and then the seat and my shoulder again and back on the roof. Where he stayed. I was hanging upside down in my seat belt looking out at the piece of field lit up by the one light remaining. The fox was stopped just at the edge of the beam, looking back, his tongue lolling out.

And beside him there, in the deeper shadow, was the woman. I knew it was for sure, that time. I mean, I was hanging upside down looking up at her legs with my eyes half glazed from spinning round in the truck, but, damn, they were beautiful legs, smooth and full where they rounded into the thighs. I looked over to Bun to see if he saw her, too, but he was still scrunched on the ceiling with his head in his armpit. Then I looked back and they were gone, she and the fox. It made me wonder again what I'd seen.

Well, Bun's dad came over with his log truck and lifted out the pickup with the grab hook and took it on home. Not before Tulley showed up, though. I told him I'd been driving and we'd had a blowout, which was easy enough to say since all four tires were dead flat. He didn't say anything, but I saw him checking the field while we were getting the truck out. I know he must have seen fox tracks. Hell, Tulley knows more about tracking than Bun. They call him to find lost kids and things. So I know he knew what we were doing there. Nothing he could do about it. The fox was gone. And I don't think he saw any other tracks. He didn't say nothing, anyway.

As for Bun, he was out of commission for the next three weeks with his neck in one of those foam collars. He fretted around the dooryard, staring at his truck and swearing to himself. Me, I was busy all May working on the roads. We had a last snow that needed sanding and then all the potholes to fill in. I kept my eye out for fur, but didn't see a one. And I have to admit, it suited me fine. I'd had my fill of roading. When the foxes and the skunks started joining up to get the best of Bun, I decided amateurs like me could just as well stay home. And I have to tell you, that woman had me spooked.

Well, Bun got the brace off and went right to work on his truck, pounding out dents and pouring in the putty. Then, as soon as he had it looking more or less whole, it disappeared. I mean, he just drove it off

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one morning and hitched home without it that evening. Then he sat around the dooryard some more, but this time with a smile on his face. That mean smile, like he had something fixed in his lights.

And about a week later he went hitching off in the morning. That evening, Darlene called me up and told me to get right over quick because Bun was in trouble.

I scooted over and pulled into the drive and around the barn, and there he was, rubbing down the newest, lowest, leanest looking sports car I had ever seen. It was one of those electric ones from Japan, all fiberglass and aluminum and about as practical up here as air-conditioned underwear. Oh, it had disappearing headlights and reclining seats and digital this and on-board that. But what it had for Bun was a dark gray body, four red fog lights hidden behind the grill, six gears plus overdrive, tires a foot and a half wide, six inches of clearance, and not an ounce of chrome anywhere. And it didn't need lids. Hell, it was electric. It didn't even need mufflers. Darlene was right about the trouble. Even trading the truck, Bun must have sold his soul for that car.

She came out and waited by the door while Bun gave me the tour under the hood. Dora was with her, fretting with her youngest on the steps. One of the cats jumped up on the roof and Bun brushed it off and went back to wiping. I got in and sat in the driver's seat. It was too damn comfortable, if you ask me. Then I craned around to look at the back, such as it was. Nothing there but an old blanket on the shelf, like you might put down to keep it clean. It didn't look like Bun. So I lifted it and there was a little loop handle. I pulled on that and the shelf came up. There was a little luggage hole underneath. And there was a live trap in it.

Well, I covered it back up and got out and went up to Darlene. She looked at me and I looked at her. There wasn't much either of us could say. We both knew what Bun was willing to pay for that fox.

"It isn't natural," Dora said under her breath. "All that car just to run down a fox. He's gone too far, this time."

Darlene didn't say anything, but I could see she was thinking about the same thing. I mean, she loved him. He was good to her and faithful and she loved him for that. But there were things she hated, too. She hated seeing the fur stretched and drying in the barn. Hated it when granddad was trapping and hated it now. It was one reason she had all the cats, I think. She'd have kept skunks, if she could.

"Ride with him, okay?" Darlene asked me. "Keep an eye on him for me?"

Well, I could think of better ways to spend my nights, and safer, but she was my sister. "I'll watch him," I said. Hell of a job I did, too.

I don't know what he did during the days, or where he put that trap,

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but I spent the next couple of weeks losing sleep and about twenty years off my life roading with Bun. We must have looked like something from the other side of Hell, slinking down the back roads with the red lights on in that soundless, night-gray car. It was kinda fun at first. I mean, it was the roader's Rolls Royce, no miss. But it wore thin pretty fast. For one thing, I had to work during the day, and you can bet I didn't feel much like sleeping at night, not with Bun at the wheel. For another thing, Tulley kept after us like a bulldog. There was no sitting still. And for another thing, I just didn't want to be there. Hell, we didn't see but two animals the whole time, and them both alive. And both escorted by the fox. We just missed one of them, but miss it we did, and the fox gave us a grin as he slid into the woods. As far as I was concerned, the fox had won.

But Bun was a man possessed. His life had come down to one thing and one thing only. Get that fox.

It was near the end of June when it finally happened. It was a full moon night, clear and bright, the kind of night when folks are out covering the garden. First day of summer or not, we were in for a frost by morning. I had a chance to sleep some after work because the sun set so late. As it was, the sun went down and the moon came up and it seemed like there wasn't much difference.

We started out at Thurston's, as usual, part of the ritual by now. Tulley was parked by the field where the road came out of the cut, as usual. He pulled out and followed us for awhile, but Bun kept it legal, cruising at forty-five with the fogs off. No sign of any fur, of course. Tulley left us when we got on the interstate, and we looped down a couple of exits and back. Then Bun drove around the back way to the cut. I got out and walked down on the shoulder till I could see the field, and then I crept through the brush to the edge. No sign of Tulley or the fox. So we went off on another loop. It was all pretty mechanical by then and not much fun, either.

Round about midnight, we came back to the cut. Bun was pretty itchy, by then. He was willing to risk meeting Tulley for a chance at the fox. I think he figured it was leading a steady stream of animals across the road every time he drove off. He shifted down and started gliding through there, quiet as a coffin. He even left the foggers off, it was that light with the moon. It was a world of shadows in the woods out the windows, nothing moving but the car and not a sound but the tires pressing into the road. I stopped breathing, and I think Bun did too.

We came around the last bend, and started gliding toward the silver open vee of the field, and then I saw something move by the side of the road. Bun saw it, too, a dark shape in the shadows, man-sized and moving slowly away. He stopped the car. The man stepped out into our lane, still

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moving away. We both knew him right away, silhouetted against the sky. It was Tulley, watching for us.

We sat still for a moment, and then Bun let her roll forward. I looked over. He was staring out the windshield, moonlight glinting in his eyes. He wasn't smiling or frowning or anything, just staring fixed on Tulley. The car started rolling faster. There was still no sound, like it was acting on its own. Or Bun was willing it forward. I tried to say something, but my mouth was dry as dirt. Tulley kept walking, his big back turned to us, and we kept picking up speed.

And then a low shape darted out into the road and started nipping at Tulley's ankles. It was the fox, barking and grabbing at his pants legs, pulling towards the woods. Tulley jumped like a man shot and looked down at that crazy fox. It barked up at him and started pulling again. He shook his leg, still looking down. Bun's eyes narrowed and he swallowed. He pressed down on the throttle. Then Tulley looked up. His eyes and mouth were dark shadows, wide-open holes when he saw that night-gray car coming at him. He dove left and the fox dove right and Bun went for the fox.

And that time he got it. I felt the bump when we hit, a funny soft sound muffled by the wide tires and expensive shocks. And I saw the body go sailing off onto the shoulder, the red fur shining almost black against the silver lit trees.

Bun hit the brakes and was out the door before we stopped sliding, a club in his hand and breathing hard. I was right behind him, came around the car just in time to see the fox raise its head and look up at him. It wasn't grinning now. Its lips were pulled back, its ears down in pain. Bun raised his club.

And I grabbed his arm and held it.

I still can't say exactly why I did that. Maybe it was Darlene and maybe it was Tulley. Maybe it was seeing that trap in the back of the car. And maybe it was the woman I'd never clearly seen at all. But I saw the fox and I saw the club and there was just no way I was going to let Bun do it.

He looked at me, face wild, his arm straining in both my hands. And the fox jumped up and headed for the woods, dragging one hind leg and its tail and dripping blood into the dirt.

Bun yelled, "Son of a bitch," in a high voice and jerked his arm free and ran after it. I yelled, "Bun," and took off after him. And behind me, Tulley yelled, "Hold it," and fired a shot that winged off a tree ahead of me and crashed into the woods.

Bun kept running and I kept after him, both of us after the fox. I heard Tulley behind me charging through the branches and my back went tight, waiting for a bullet. Bun stopped suddenly, and I ran into him,

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but he shook me off and turned to the left, following a faint trail in the moss and shadows. I chased after him, ducking branches and catching more than a few in my face, losing my breath and still running, with Tulley gaining behind.

Then we came to the river and splashed across, spray sparkling up around us, and went back into the shadows. I heard Tulley splash across, too, but then the crashing got fainter, and then we came to the river again. I stopped, because we shouldn't have come back to the river, not unless I was totally turned around in the moonlight and shadows. But there it was, dark and shining. A single line of silver-gray stones led across, each marked with a drop of blood. A thick stand of pine covered the other bank, black and silver, the moonlight lost in the first tall shadows.

Bun went across like a dancer, stepping on the blood. I followed as best I could, half on and half off the stones. The water was cold as the depths of December. The shadows in the pines were even colder. I thought I knew the woods, but I'd never seen that grove of old, old pine.

I almost lost Bun there, it was that dark, like passing through a door into a tomb. But then I saw him running, a shadow in the shadows, and I went after.

And I came out into a sudden clearing, a round hole in the dark trees with the moon shining clear right overhead. Bun was halfway to the center ahead of me. And beyond him was the fox, still dragging its leg. And beyond it, at the center of the moonlight, was the woman, as pale and curved as I remembered. That's what I do remember the most, the fullness of her, like a nursing mother. Or the perfect lover.

Well, I stopped dead, and Bun stopped, too, his eyes suddenly filled with something other than fox. It went up to the woman and lay down at her feet. She looked down at it. And then at us. And even from that distance, I could see her eyes, big and clear and growing wider as she looked on us. I shrank from that look. And she seemed to grow, looming up in the clearing, looking down on Bun and me with sheer disgust, till her terrible, beautiful face blocked out the moon.

Something else moved in the clearing then. Something big and night gray, with eyes wide apart and high above us shining in the moonlight. And there were teeth, shining in a long muzzle. Way above us. Moving toward us.

I stood there, frozen. But Bun turned tail and bounded by me toward the trees, and I took one last look at that thing coming toward us where the woman had been and sprung off after him. He dodged around the giant trunks, me right on his tail, hopping roots and scrambling. I heard the beast come loping after us, panting in the dark shadows, and I ran harder.

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We came to the river and Bun went bounding across the blood-marked stones, heels flashing in the moonlight. I splashed after him, stone after stone across, so wide it seemed a lake, the last jump so far I almost went down in the shallows on the other side. I lay there panting, but then I heard something splashing after me. If I thought it would stop at the river, I was wrong. I hopped up and kept going into the woods after Bun.

He took the clearest route through the woods, fleeing beneath the branches and the brush, leaving me behind. My breath was coming ragged and I could hardly keep my legs pumping. I was running on all fours, a scared rabbit, pawing at the dirt just to keep going. And the beast was gaining on me. I could hear it panting on my heels, its claws scratching on the stones and roots as it came over them after me.

And then it grabbed my leg. I felt teeth holding on my calf, and I went down, kicking back with my other foot and pulling with my hands at the ground. I looked back into huge, clear eyes. I kicked again and landed a good one on its nose. I felt the jolt through my foot and then it let me go and I crashed through the last bit of brush after Bun into bright lights speeding down on me and a blaring horn. Then something hit my leg and threw me around and through the air and I hit pavement and went out.

I woke up in the hospital, with my leg in a cast and sunlight streaming through the window and Tulley leaning over me. He looked like Hell, I tell you. His face was all scratched and bruised and there were dark bags under his eyes and black fly bites all over his neck. He saw my eyes open and came close. His own were wide and staring, like Bun's had been.

"Where is he?" he said. His voice was hoarse, too.

"Who?" I said. They had me doped up on something, I think, because my own voice sounded pretty thin.

"Bun. Who do you think? Where is he?" He clenched his jaw and leaned even closer. I started remembering things.

"He was right in front of me," I said. "Where is he? Where's Bun?"

He grabbed my shoulders and asked me again. "Where's Bun?"

We must have sounded like a real pair. It got to the point where I could only shake my head and shrug, and finally he left.

Turns out he'd spent the entire night chasing in circles after us in the woods. At least, he thought he was chasing us. He came out at dawn in Thurston's field, no more than a hundred yards from where he'd gone in. And right up to that point, he'd sworn he was right behind us.

Me, I came out ten miles away on the interstate. That's right, ten miles. Right in front of a Mack truck coming down from Canada. The driver says I just about fell onto the road from nowhere. He says he didn't hit me. I hit him. Ran right into the side of his bumper. If I'd got there

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one second sooner, I'd have been in a body cast. Or dead. If that beast hadn't held onto me.

And Bun. They never found Bun. And they looked, let me tell you, Tulley most of all. They scoured the whole valley looking for him. Tracked him and me as far as the river, but lost the trail there. Then they tried to backtrack my route from the interstate. It ended in an animal run a hundred feet from the roadway.

They asked me a lot of questions about what went on in the woods there, but what could I tell them? I said we'd gotten lost and then gotten spooked by a bear or something and that I was running after Bun I thought when I hit the truck. I could hardly tell them about the clearing and the woman. I can't even remember her face for sure, although there are times when I think she looked something like Darlene, tall and fair. And other times I think she must have looked like Dora. I remember the fullness. I remember the moon shining white on her smooth skin. I remember the eyes. But you know, I don't really remember.

It was late fall by the time I got the cast off and could walk well enough to go into the woods. I went in as far as the river and looked across, but there was nothing there. Just the same old woods, looking gray and tired with the leaves off. I stayed till dusk, wondering. It just didn't seem right, Bun being lost somewhere in those woods. Running for his life. I sometimes wonder what would have happened if I hadn't grabbed his hand then when he could have got the fox. Or if he'd managed to trap it. Or if he'd never tried the trap at all.

The fox disappeared the same time. Hurt too bad, I guess, or maybe it just gave up. I still look for it when I'm out driving at night. I got this feeling it's still out there. At least, I hope it is. The woman, too. I see red eyes at the side of the road, glowing in the headlights, and I slow way down to look. And if something moves on the road, I dodge. ●

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HARLAN ELLISON'S I, ROBOT

by Isaac Asimov

I have never had a novel or story converted into a motion picture or television play. Some people think that the motion picture *Fantastic Voyage* is mine, but that's wrong. The motion picture script existed, and was written by Jerome Bixby and others, and I was asked to make a novel out of it. I finally agreed and, because I work quickly and movie people work slowly, the derived novel came out six months before the movie. That made it seem as though the novel was original and the movie an adaptation, but the reverse was the fact.

My non-appearance on the screen has not bothered me. I am strictly a print-person. I write material that is intended to appear on a printed page, and not on a screen, either large or small. I have been invited on numerous occasions to write a screenplay for motion picture or television, either original, or as an adaptation of my own story or someone else's, and I have refused every time. Whatever talents I may have, writing for the eye is not one of them, and I am lucky enough to know what I can't do.

On the other hand, if someone else—someone who has the particular talent of writing for the eye that I do not have—were to adapt one of my stories for the screen, I would not expect that the screen version be "faithful" to the print version.

Why should it be? The mere fact that I am completely at home in print and completely helpless in the visual convinces me that two widely separate interpretations are involved.

The medium of print uses the word. Images may be evoked by the word, but this is a subsidiary side effect. It is the sound of words tiptoeing their way through the mind that is primary.

The medium of the screen uses the image. Dialogue is almost always involved, but this is a subsidiary side effect. It is the patterned light of colored images flashing their way past the retina that is primary.

In telling a particular story, the medium is the message (as it was once a short-lived fad to say). In using words, certain things are stressed; in using images, other things are stressed, even if the same events are described in both cases.

A mediocre book can be translated into a good movie and a good book

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can be translated into a mediocre movie. The point is, though, that if a good book is translated into a good movie (or, less frequently, vice versa) this is not because there was a literal conversion of one into another, scene by scene. There would have to be differences, even radical ones, if both are to be good.

This is especially true if the book is written by one person and the movie adaptation written by another, each person being equally imaginative and creative. Notice that "equally" does *not* mean "identically." If the adapter follows slavishly the model with which he is presented, as I did in the case of *Fantastic Voyage,* he is denying himself. That is why I was never satisfied with *Fantastic Voyage* even though it did very well in hard covers and superlatively well in paperback. In fact, that is why I finally wrote *Fantastic Voyage II*—to be published in September 1987—which is, in a way, a similar story, but written as *I* would write it so that it is totally different from the movie, and from the earlier novel.

This brings me to the occasion on which I *nearly* had a book translated to the screen. Twenty years ago, a producer, John Mantley, grew interested in *I, Robot* and, after considerable dickering, an option was agreed to. I have frequently had stories and novels optioned for the movies and it represents a moderate source of income but nothing ever seems to come of it.

For a while, nothing seemed to come of *I, Robot,* either. For years, in fact. The option was renewed, and renewed, and renewed. Finally, after a dozen years it was actually bought and the creaking machinery of Hollywood was set in motion. They asked me to do the screen adaptation and, of course, I refused. So they did an extraordinarily intelligent thing. They got Harlan Ellison to do it.

Harlan and I are close friends. He knows my work and likes it. I know his work and like it. Though he and I are alike in many ways—extroverted, loud-mouthed, charismatic individuals—our writing couldn't be more different. Mine is almost entirely cerebral, his almost entirely emotional. And that's good. Seeing my stuff through Harlan's eyes is bound to add another, and very intriguing, dimension.

So Harlan wrote the screen-play, some years ago, and sent me a copy and I loved it. Susan Calvin was in it, so were Gregory Powell and Michael Donovan, so were some of my robots. The plot that Harlan built up out of the materials I had provided in the book was viewed through a distorting glass that brought out new and startling facets. His screen-play would have made a *marvelous* movie, in my opinion.

But note the conditional. It *would* have made one. The fact is it didn't.

There were several reasons for this. One was that Harlan's imagination took no account of the economic facts of life. The picture would have cost some thirty million dollars to make, and the movie people were not sure

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they could get their millions back. I really can't fault them for being concerned about that.

Secondly, Harlan's screenplay came after the motion picture *Star Wars* had appeared, and Hollywood people are not exactly known for their ability to break out of a money-making mold. Since *Star Wars* had coined millions, Harlan was asked to make the robots "cute," like R2D2, and they also wanted him to make Susan Calvin young and pretty like Princess Leia.

Thirdly, Harlan is not known for his equanimity and pliability. When he is asked to do something stupid, he is quite likely to say, "This is stupid," with some ornamental additions of his own. And Hollywood executives are likely to take this amiss.

So the picture was never made, and for additional years remained in limbo. Then, finally, Harlan regained control of the screenplay and, unwilling to see it gather dust, decided to try to publish it in *IAsfm*. Gardner read the screenplay and thought it might make a unique item for the magazine. He consulted me and I agreed. I agreed all the more readily because it is *not* a slavish adaptation, so it can't be considered a matter of self-aggrandizement on my part. The screenplay is as much Harlan Ellison as the book is Isaac Asimov, and even if you've read the book, you'll find the space allotted to the screenplay is anything but wasted.

And you'll be sorry, as I am, that Hollywood didn't make the movie. ●

ME 'N' ISAAC AT THE MOVIES

a brief memoir of Citizen Calvin

by Harlan Ellison

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I spent an entire year at the movies with Asimov, and never once did I have to share the popcorn. It broke both our hearts that the film never got made. But that was neither Isaac's nor my fault; it was the fault of a jerk who ain't at Warner Bros. no more; and good riddance to him.

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From December 1977 through December 1978 I wrote nothing very much . . . apart from two hundred and thiry-five pages of screenplay titled *I, Robot.* What it was, folks, was not some dumb mechanical-man movie, it was the life story of Susan Calvin, the world's first robopsychologist. And it broke my heart, it borke Isaac's heart, that when it had all been set down on paper, a terrible truism was invoked. Here it is:

> "Writing is an occupation in which you have to keep proving your talent to people who have none."
>
> *Jules Renard* (1864–1910)

When this jerk who was the head of the studio received the manuscript, and we waited and waited for his "input," and weeks went by and we heard nothing, I finally asked to have a meeting with him, to find out what was happening. And in the course of that meeting, during which he mumbled nebulosities without specificities, it became clear that *he had never even read the script!* (This cannot be, I thought, with genuine horror. Can you understand what was happening? Here was a man, head of production for one of the greatest film factories in the world, talking about spending between seventeen and twenty *million* dollars on an international project that would tie up Warner Bros. for at least two years, employ thousands and thousands of people, and not only bring to life a work on which I'd spent a full year of my life and talent but at last—after twenty years of unsuccessful attempts—send Isaac's wonderful positronic cycle to hungry audiences throughout the world . . . who was making imbecile suggestions based wholly on *précis* of the complex and far-flung story by anonymous readers from his staff. This cannot be, I thought; I'm having a nightmare. So I set out to verify my suspicion. I began asking him specific questions on pivotal points in the plot. His responses were vague, general, disingenuous. I was certain I'd found him out, but just to make absolutely certain, I asked him how he liked such-and-such . . . a "major" scene . . . that did not occur in the screenplay at all. He admired that part, he said. He thought that part worked very well indeed, he said.)

At that point I knew he was simply shuckin' & jivin', and I pulled his covers. "You haven't read this script!" I said.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. You haven't read a word of this material. I spent a year on it, you're planning to commit to the biggest project the studio has ever attempted, and you haven't even had the sense of responsibility to look at the work personally. Not only are you creatively irresponsible, but fiscally you're just dancing on thin ice! You've got the intellectual capacity of an artichoke!"

Well, we exchanged words. You see, *no*body speaks to the Great and Wonderful Wizard like that, not nobody, no time, nohow! And then I laid

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hands on him. I advised him that he had just twenty-four hours to read that script, to make notes *in his own hand* so we'd know he hadn't shunted the job to some flunky, and to get those suggestions back to me and Edward Lewis, the fine and talented producer who had ramrodded the project. Then I left the studio and went home, quivering with rage.

By the time I got home, and called Eddie Lewis to apprise him of the debacle, the spud from the studio had already phoned Eddie. With trepidation I asked Eddie what he'd said. Eddie was thrilled at the call: the man I'd just threatened and insulted had told him how impressed he was with my sincerity, my commitment to the work, and my desire to work closely with the studio. He said it had been a "fruitful meeting" and that he had had no trouble communicating with me. I sat down. Had I been at some *other* meeting, with some other studio exec?

Well, needless to say, we never got that list of suggestions. Not in his hand, or anyone else's. That meeting took place on October 25, 1978. On October 31 I began revising the script based on the non-suggestions we had earlier received. By January of 1979 I'd been dropped from the project.

Warner Bros. then spent almost two years having other screenwriters do at least three subsequent versions of my script. One of the writers had major credits. All three of the follow-up scripts were shopped around Hollywood, in search of a major director who would take the assignment. I was kept up-to-date on the machinations. Apparently, the scripts were insufficiently loveable (according to my informants) and none of the top directors who saw them cared to accept the job. The spud from the studio, when approached by *Variety* to explain why I had been dropped when my screenplay was so universally admired, said—in print, for attribution— "I'll close the studio before I rehire Ellison. *No* one tells me I have the intellectual capacity of an artichoke!"

(It was my feeling that only an intellect on the level of a foodstuff would cop to having had such a thing said about him, when he could have kept it to himself. Thus validating my perception about the guy.)

But by June of 1980, Warners had approached Irvin Kershner (who had just completed directing *The Empire Strikes Back*, which had opened to rave reviews for his work); he had been aware of the *I, Robot* project for some time, and he said he was interested. But when they sent him the most recent of the follow-up scripts, he rejected the assignment. He didn't like the dream they'd offered him. But he asked them, "Wasn't there a script by Harlan Ellison on this?"

They fumfuh'd and hemmed, also hawed.

"Well, was there or wasn't there?"

They admitted there was such a creature extant.

"Let me see Ellison's version," Kersh said.

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So they sent it to him. "This script I'll direct," he said. "But only if Ellison does the rewrite."

The studio head ground his teeth. He was trapped. So he agreed to let Kersh rehire me if Irvin would sign a contract to direct *I, Robot*. It looked like a go.

Kersh came to see me in London, where I was working on a book, and we discussed how the screenplay should be redone. His suggestions were excellent. They cut the budget but did not impair the story or the subtext. It looked like a go.

That was in June of 1980. Kersh signed. Then the studio pasha told him to go find a new writer. "But the deal was contingent on Ellison coming back aboard," he said. No way, said the honorable exec. "I'll close down this studio before I rehire Ellison. *No* one tells me I have the intellectual capacity of an artichoke!"

Kersh called me. He was locked into the deal, and they had double-crossed both of us. I wasn't surprised. I revised my estimation of the studio guy. A lima bean.

Well . . . it never happened. Kersh managed to get out of the deal; then Warner Bros. hired a Russian director who had had some critical success with a small film; and he met some guy at Columbia University with whom he worked on yet *another* version of my script; and that incarnation was represented to me by a top production executive as "the single worst script I've ever read in my life, made no damned sense at all." And *I, Robot* went into limbo, dumped on a shelf with the hundreds of thousands of other screenplays that had been written in this town over the decades that had fallen between the cracks for reasons beyond the artistic or filmic value of the work itself. Eddie Lewis left the project, Warners had hundreds of thousands of dollars tied up in the project, the underlying rights to Isaac's stories (without which the film could not be produced) were lost by the Studio, litigation among the original participants followed, and there it remains—in limbo—to this day.

About a year and a half ago, the producer of *Star Wars* and *The Dark Crystal*, Gary Kurtz, approached Warners about taking over the project. He came to see me several times, and again it looked as if we might have a go. But the vast expenses already attached to the script, and the ongoing legal hassles, seem to have put the kibosh on Gary's desire to make this movie.

It remains, sadly, an unproduced epic.

And I haven't even gone into how the screenplay first came to be, how it happened that I, of all people, was first contacted to beat a project that no one had been able to whip into shape in two decades. I haven't told you of the odd synchronicity of debt-repayment and friendship that began this story, or of how the *Logan's Run* television series figured in. Nor of

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the part played in all this by John Mantley of *Gunsmoke* fame.

If you're interested, let the editors know; and perhaps at some later time I can give you all that history. Fascinating stuff.

But for now, I will merely quote from Isaac's letter to me dated 9 March 1978, soon after I'd sent him the completed screenplay:

"Dear Harlan, I received the screenplay.

"I read the screenplay and the outline.

"I love the screenplay and the outline. I think it's great. I think no one but you could have done it. Don't fight with anyone—make reasonable compromises when you have to—don't get ulcers—and see to it that it's the first really adult, complex, worthwhile science fiction movie ever made. You'll be famous and I'll shine in reflected glory.

"Any argument—I back you all the way. I'm not interested in a *literal* interpretation of the book. Movies are not books and 1970s are not 1940s. *You're* the boss."

It broke our hearts.

Because this screenplay is the story of Susan Calvin. I wrote it with Joanne Woodward in mind as Susan. George C. Scott as Rev. Soldash; Keenan Wynn and Ernie Borgnine as Donovan and Powell; Martin Sheen as Robert Bratenahl. You can picture them as you read. But know this:

We suffer, these days, in Hollywood, from a great many writers whose background is not in literature, but in television upbringing. They were raised on *I Love Lucy*. When some of these people go into theatrical features, they use as templates the shallow devices of the sitcom. Spielberg and Lucas make films that are *hommage* to Saturday morning serials, pop goods that are amusing for children but certainly cannot be considered great art. When I set out to interpret Isaac's stories, when I sat down to beat this problem of integrating only-vaguely-linked stories written over a long period, I knew that the key was not the robot . . . it was the human story of Susan Calvin. And for my model I decided to go to High Art. *I, Robot* is framed as an *hommage* to *Citizen Kane*, arguably the finest motion picture ever made. It was my hope that by treating Isaac's work in the most serious way from the start, I would produce not only an adult film that would make my liaison with Isaac something that would live forever, but would satisfy the disparate needs of the studio, the producers, my own creative desires, and Isaac's primacy of interest in the material. And would respond not to the *reality* of those forty-year-old stories, but to the loving recollections of readers.

Though it lies on a shelf somewhere at Warner Bros., Isaac and I, and the editors of this magazine, present this gift to you, for your pleasure.

The life of Citizen Calvin. The record of a wonderful year of hard work I spent at the movies with my friend Isaac Asimov, who first dreamed of metal men and a remarkable woman. ●

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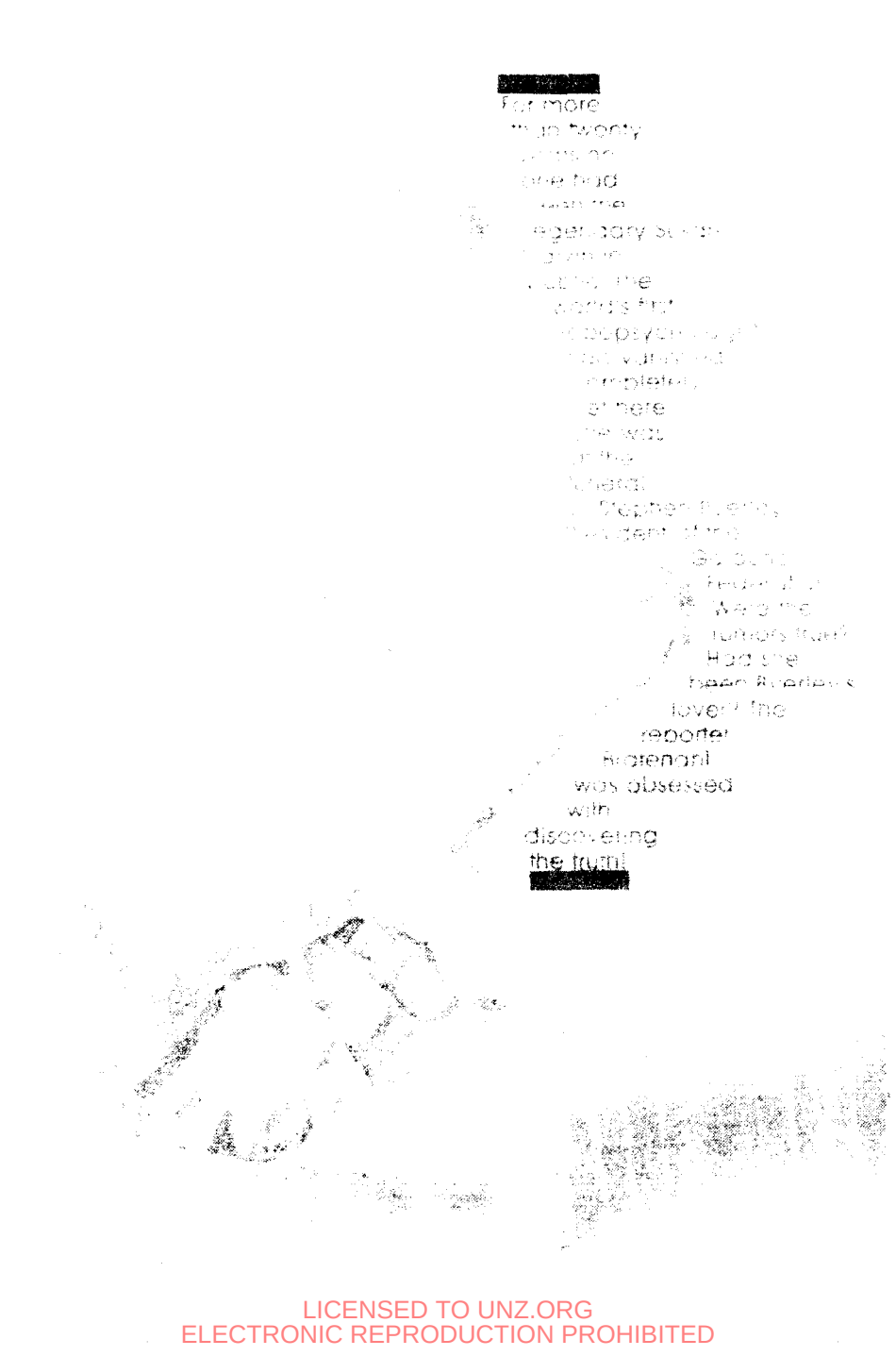

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(Part One of Three)

I, ROBOT: THE MOVIE

by Harlan Ellison

art: Terry Lee

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FADE IN:

1 BLACK FRAME

The SOUND of an insistent high-pitched BEEP-BEEP is heard. It is not strident enough to make one wince, but it is very clearly intended to get and hold one's attention. The SOUND CONTINUES for several seconds, then in the center of the frame a line of copy prints itself in one of the machine languages (ALGOL, FORTRAN, COBOL or, more likely, BASIC).

ALL OPERATORS HOLD INPUTS

It begins to STROBE in FLUORESCENT GREEN in letters large enough to be easily read. The strobing is in sequence with the beeping. Then, below that line (still strobing), a second line prints out and we realize we are looking at a

COMPUTER TERMINAL READOUT PANEL

PRIORITY ONE INFORMATION IN TRANSMISSION

The second line begins to STROBE in GREEN in alternate sequence with the first line. Then both vanish to be replaced by

THE THREE LAWS OF ROBOTICS

The line holds for several beats as the beeping continues. Then the screen is cleared and the following appears:

1—A ROBOT MAY NOT INJURE A HUMAN
BEING, OR, THROUGH INACTION, ALLOW
A HUMAN BEING TO COME TO HARM.

This message HOLDS as we HEAR in b.g. the SOUND of WATER BUBBLING. The very faintest of luminescence begins to suffuse the frame, as though dawn were coming up far in the distance. We can still read the First Law clearly. Then it wipes and a second message prints itself:

2—A ROBOT MUST OBEY THE ORDERS
GIVEN IT BY HUMAN BEINGS EXCEPT
WHERE SUCH ORDERS WOULD
CONFLICT WITH THE FIRST LAW.

This message HOLDS as the SOUND of BUBBLING WATER grows louder and the filtering of light in the frame grows more pronounced. Now we see gradations of brightness and darkness, and a vague upward movement of the b.g. as if we were reading the Three Laws through water. The Second Law wipes and a third message prints itself:

(CONTINUED:)

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1 CONTINUED:

3—A ROBOT MUST PROTECT ITS OWN
EXISTENCE AS LONG AS SUCH
PROTECTION DOES NOT CONFLICT
WITH THE FIRST OR SECOND LAWS.

This message HOLDS clearly and easily read in the glowing green computerese as the light fills the b.g. and we see bubbles of water rising in streams from the bottom of the frame. CAMERA BEGINS TO PULL BACK as the Third Law wipes and a final line of printout STROBES large and *RED*:

THESE ARE THE THREE LAWS OF ROBOTICS.
THEY CANNOT BE BROKEN.

CAMERA BACK though we can read this last message clearly. As CAMERA PULLS BACK we realize we have been reading the printout in the ultramodern magnetic fluid tank of a very highly advanced "liquid memory system," one of the new "water computers" that use a magnetic fluid instead of printed circuits to store data. It is a huge unit, awesome in its complexity, backlit and seething with life as reflected in its terminals and control banks, but centered on that liquid intelligence in the great translucent pillar of bubbling fluid. CAMERA HOLDS on the fluid and its rising bubbles as we

MATCH-DISSOLVE THRU:

2 CHROMA/KEY SHOT – GRAVESITE ON ALDEBARAN-C XII

MATCH WITH RAIN

The bubbles of the preceding SHOT MATCH with RAIN coming down in sheeting slanting grayness. We are clearly on another planet, in point of fact the twelfth planet out from the third sun of the triple-star Aldebaran. We are looking at a group of people, some human, some aliens, gathered around a peculiar gravesite. And we are seeing them in SOLARIZATION (bright, fluorescent color of choice). HOLD the shot in Chroma/Key solarization for several beats as we HEAR the VOICE of ROBERT BRATENAHL speaking o.s.

BRATENAHL (O.S.)
(hushed tones)
On this day of mourning, even the three suns of Aldebaran-C XII seem to have gone out.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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2 CONTINUED:

BRATENAHL (O.S.) (CONT'D.)
(beat)
A sorrowful rain attends the funeral of Stephen Byerley, First President of the Galactic Federation.
(beat)
This is Robert Bratenahl, at graveside for *Cosmos* Magazine.

As the preceding DIALOGUE OVER progresses, CAMERA MOVES IN toward the gravesite and suddenly the CHROMA/KEY view of the scene moves aside so we can see it was an image in a VIEW-SCREEN on a minicam sort of apparatus. Now we see the scene through our own eyes.

3 GRAVESIDE SCENE – MED. LONG SHOT

as we MOVE IN. The grave itself is a circular pit perhaps three feet in diameter. A shining metal pillar protrudes from the hole and embedded in the top is a wonderfully-shaped vacuum bottle in which a foglike mist floats, its substance sparkling with tiny scintillas of colored light. Through the slanting rain we can see a dozen forms, some of peculiar—but still humanoid—form, others clearly human. CAMERA MOVES IN STEADILY as we

CUT TO:

4 ANOTHER ANGLE – INCLUDING BRATENAHL

as he moves toward the group, yet is politely separated from them by protocol. Bratenahl is a tall, graceful man who seems to be in his mid-thirties, yet there is a fine, boyish quality about him, the young James Stewart perhaps. He wears a harness rig on which we see a modernistic piece of equipment that is obviously the camera and transmitting device through which we saw the solarized scene earlier. The screen has been swept back from in front of his face, but the minicam keeps filming as he walks through the rain. We CONTINUE TO HEAR HIS VOICE OVER.

BRATENAHL (V.O.)
Earlier this morning, in a private predawn ceremony, the body of President Byerley was atomized, by his specific request. The vacuum bottle you see on the burial pillar contains a token mist scintillated from the star chamber where the atomization occurred.

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5 MED. LONG SHOT ON GRAVESIDE – MOVING IN

CAMERA MOVES IN STEADILY through the slanting rain as SHOT begins to FEATURE an old woman, huddled between two tall, heroically-proportioned young men. At first we cannot see her face because of the rain-hood. Each of the men holds a slim silver rod, as do several others of the mourners around the grave. The rods are held aloft, and though they are not attached to anything, the rain does not fall below the level of the rods. They are implements that create an invisible force-field, and though there are more important uses for them, in this case they are employed to keep the rain off the old woman. As CAMERA COMES IN we HEAR the VOICE of BRATENAHL OVER:

BRATENAHL (V.O.)
Clustered around the burial pillar are the living legends of our time, those select few Stephen Byerley called his closest friends. President Bramhall of the Orion Constellation; Dion Fabry of Perseus; Karl Hawkstein of the Triangulum . . .
(beat)
Well, I'll be damned . . .
(catches himself)
Central! Edit that out.
(beat)
Reference: punch me up a scan on C-for-cat Calvin. First name, Susan. Robo-psychologist.

As the preceding VOICE OVER ends we have come up to a CLOSE SHOT on the old woman standing dry and huddled as the rain pours down around her force-field shield. For the first time we see the face of SUSAN CALVIN. She is eighty-two years old, but because of the anti-agapic injections looks a well-preserved and alert sixty. She is a small woman, but there is a towering strength in her face. Tensile strength, that speaks to endurance, to maintaining in the imperfect world. Her mouth is thin, and her face pale. Grace lives in her features, and intelligence; but she is not an attractive woman. She is not one of those women who in later years it can be said of them, "She must have been a beauty when she was younger." Susan Calvin was always plain. And clearly, always a powerful personality.

CUT TO:

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6 MINICAM IMAGE – SUSAN CALVIN

It is the same face, but younger. See: she wasn't pretty, even then. But the potency is there. The image, broadcast from Central, light-years away in another star-system, fills the FRAME as we HEAR the VOICE of Bratenahl OVER:

BRATENAHL (V.O.)
(jubilant)
I was *right*! It's Calvin!
(beat)
Central! Give me everything readout you've got on Susan Calvin.
(beat)
Especially cross-reference materials with Calvin and Stephen Byerley together.

The image breaks up into scintillance, is replaced by green fluorescent words in lines that stream onto black field. (Full text to be provided for production.)

BRATENAHL (V.O.) (CONT'D.)
Born 1994, Old Earth Time. Father, Edward Winslow Calvin, middle-level executive, U.S. Robots Corp., died 2004. Mother, Stephanie Ordway Calvin, died at birth of daughter . . .

CUT TO:

7 GRAVESIDE – ON BRAMHALL

officiating at the ceremony. BRAMHALL is in his seventies, tall, distinguished, dressed in the severe togalike clothing of his galaxy's home world, his three sets of arms folded across his middle, twenty-four fingers clasped.

PRES. BRAMHALL
(gently)
I've heard it said: life is only a troubled sound between two silences.
(beat)
Stephen Byerley spent nearly half a century, forty years Old Earth Time, gentling that troubled sound, sweetening it for the thousand races of the million worlds.
(beat)
Goodbye, Stephen, old friend . . .

CUT BACK TO:

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8 SAME AS 6 – VIEWSCREEN OF MINICAM

as a series of READOUT SCENES (some in b&w, some in single color overlay, some in full color, some in Graphiconversion pattern overlays—see below for examples) flash on and off the minicam showing a variety of clips as the CENTRAL COMMUNICAST VOICE succinctly identifies each scene OVER:

spiral

steel engraving

wavy line

tone line

SAME AS 48 – ASSEMBLY ROOM, U.S. ROBOMEK: on the balcony running around the perimeter of the robot assembly complex. Susan (age 21) and ALFRED LANNING with HALF A DOZEN EXECUTIVES of U.S. Robots, smiling, shaking hands, pointing out across the buzzing conveyor line of robots assembling robots.

COMMUNICAST VOICE (FILTER)
At age twenty-one, Dr. Susan Calvin joins staff of U.S. Robots and Mechanical Men as first fully accredited robopsychologist; year, 2015. (*Year spoken as: twenty-fifteen*)

SAME AS 272 – INT. U.S. ROBOMEK TEST AREA NINE: four LNE model robots cutting diamonds in the b.g. as we see Susan Calvin, Alfred Lanning, NORMAN BOGERT and various REPS OF THE COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA being shown Lenny, one of the robots.

COMMUNICAST VOICE (FILTER)
Year 2032, Dr. Susan Calvin develops multi-purpose robot based on LNE model.

(CONTINUED:)

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8 CONTINUED:

SAME AS 216 – INT. EARTHCENTRAL COMPUTER COMPLEX: down the shaft into high-ceilinged tunnel filled with complex, multifaced, flickering computer banks of incredibly advanced design, to the group of EARTHCENTRAL OFFICIALS, STEPHEN BYERLEY and a small group of others. FREEZE-FRAME and MOVE IN on the group of others till we get Susan Calvin, hidden in that group, in CU. A red fluorescent circle appears around her face.

COMMUNICAST VOICE (FILTER)
Year 2036, rising political figure Stephen Byerley taken on tour of the underground EarthCentral computer complex.

(beat)

Total Central scan reveals this as first public appearance of Byerley and Calvin together. No mention made of this at the time.

CUT TO:

9 DESCENDING BOOM SHOT – ON GRAVESITE

As DION FABRY of Perseus steps forward. He wears an all-enshrouding blood-red cape that has a high-standing stiff collar. We can barely see his features. As he comes to the pillar, he sweeps back the cape to reveal long, thin insectlike arms ending in leafy pads. He places the fronds of his hands on the pillar and speaks. His voice is strange and deep, hardly what we would expect from a creature half-human, half-vegetable.

DION FABRY
(sadly)
He saved my world and my race. What can I say in love and loss to this container of his essence that was never said to him in life?

(beat)

God be between you and harm in all the empty places you walk, Stephen.

CUT BACK TO:

10 CLOSE ON BRATENAHL – SPEAKING INTO MINICAM

BRATENAHL
(urgently)
I don't care if he's on Withdrawn Status! Patch this through, Priority One! Yes, dammit, I'm still recording!

(CONTINUED:)

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10 CONTINUED:

A face begins to assume shape in the lines on the minicam. It is the face of a bulldog-man, half-asleep, jowly, but with quickening alertness in the eyes. It is ROWE, the editor of *Cosmos* Magazine.

ROWE
(angrily)
What're you, a brain-damage case? You know what time it is here?
(blinks)
Who the hell is that . . . Bratenahl? What's the matter?

BRATENAHL
Susan Calvin is here at Byerley's funeral!

ROWE
(astounded)
Damn! Did you catch it for record?

BRATENAHL
Of course.

ROWE
(jubilant)
Hot damn! She finally turned up! And at Byerley's *funeral*! I always had a feeling that rumor about them being lovers was true.
(beat)
Go get her!

BRATENAHL
Hey, wait on there, Rowe! She hasn't even been *seen* for twenty years, much less given an interview. This is high level security out here. They could pull my matrix and ground me if I invade personal space.

ROWE
Bratenahl: you miss this and *I'll* pull your matrix. You'll be grounded so goddamned long they'll plant potatoes in you.

BRATENAHL
(worried)
Will *Cosmos* back me?

(CONTINUED:)

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10 CONTINUED: – 2

ROWE
All the way.

BRATENAHL
On the record?

ROWE
Yes.
(beat)
If you get busted I'll have to go to the publishing committee to bail you out . . . but I'll do it. You have my word.

BRATENAHL
Your word? Rowe, I don't think speech is your natural language. You ought to rattle like a snake.

CUT TO:

11 ANOTHER ANGLE ON GRAVESIDE – MED. SHOT

as the pillar is lowered into the ground. Everyone stands with heads bowed. As the pillar descends, an attendant steps forward with a laser-sealer and melts the ground till it bubbles and glows yellow and turns to glass that seals the hole. All that remains is a smooth, circular reflective surface that hisses as raindrops spatter on it.

The crowd begins to move away, to disperse. As Susan Calvin and her two GUARDS walk TOWARD CAMERA, Bratenahl—still recording—moves into the FRAME and toward them, on a course that intersects them.

12 CLOSE ON SUSAN CALVIN

as her face comes up from its shadowed rain-hood hiding. She looks directly at us, and at Bratenahl o.s.

13 2-SHOT – BRATENAHL & CALVIN

as he comes up to the trio.

BRATENAHL
Dr. Calvin? I'm Robert Bratenahl from *Cosmos* Magazine. May I—

Her face is a mask of anguish. There are tears in her eyes. A lost expression overlying the power of her presence. CAMERA PULLS BACK SLIGHTLY to include the two Guards with her.

(CONTINUED:)

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13 CONTINUED:

1st GUARD
Excuse us, please. It's raining.

2nd GUARD
Not now, sir, if you please.

BRATENAHL
But if you could spare me just a mo—

1st GUARD
(with an edged voice)
It's *raining*, sir. Dr. Calvin might catch cold.

BRATENAHL
(to Calvin)
There are tears in your eyes. Millions would have come to pay tribute, but only a dozen were allowed; only the few who were closest. And you have tears.

She stares at him more closely now. Her mouth tightens. Her eyes flash with anger.

CALVIN
(quietly)
Doesn't Central have a readout, Mr. Bratenahl? Isn't that the final responsibility of all cheap gossip?

She starts to move forward. The two Guards put themselves in Bratenahl's path, even as they continue to hold the force-field rods over her. She goes past, with 1st Guard protecting her, keeping her dry. The other speaks to Bratenahl:

2nd GUARD
This was very poor form, sir. It should be evident this is an inopportune moment for such things.

BRATENAHL
I suggest it's the first moment in twenty years, OE Time. I'm a communicaster, sir. It's my job.

2nd GUARD
And mine is guaranteeing her privacy. There are laws, sir. Let us go quietly.

And he moves away, hurrying to catch Calvin. Bratenahl watches.

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14 LONG SHOT – PAST BRATENAHL

as Susan Calvin and her two Guards reach a low pyramidal structure sitting alone on the empty plain, nothing near it. It is perhaps eight feet in height, a squat pyramid of smooth metallic sides that seem to have peculiar chromatics rippling in the surfaces. As the three people approach, one of the faces of the pyramid pivots open, the wall disappearing into a slit in the adjoining wall. The 1st Guard steps into the utter darkness within the pyramid as CAMERA ZOOMS IN on him.

His shape suddenly breaks up into a million light-motes, all scintillating and vibrating, shot through with gold and silver highlights, but retaining a human shape. Then the shape contracts to a mass of closely-packed atoms, and as we watch they seem to be fired off in a stream of light, like tracer bullets in the night. Then Susan Calvin steps in, and the same thing happens; then the 2nd Guard, and he is gone. CAMERA ZOOMS OUT FAST to HOLD Bratenahl in CU. With his back to us, we HEAR him say:

BRATENAHL
There are tears in your eyes, Dr. Calvin.

DISSOLVE TO:

15 BRIGHT LIGHT FILLS FRAME

as CAMERA PULLS BACK we see it is a point of light at the end of a light-fiber. CAMERA CONTINUES BACK and we see the light-fiber filament is being inserted into the womb of a pregnant woman in a cold-chill trough on an operating stage. Three medical technicians work around her. One of them is BERNICE JOLO, a surgeon specializing in the cellular science of amniocentesis: the withdrawing of amniotic fluid from the embryonic sac. The fiber is inserted, and hooked to a complex mechanism that is revealed to be a video-microscope.

BERNICE
Fine tune it, Eunice.

The second technician fiddles with dials, and a picture of the sac and the embryonic child within appears on a TV relay screen.

BERNICE
You were right. The left arm is twisted under. Let's go in.

Incredibly tiny "waldos" (manipulable metal fingers on the end of slim armatures) are extruded from the complex mechanism, and inserted into the womb. The technicians bend over the woman. We watch the work on the screen.

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16 ON BERNICE – CLOSE

as she works over the woman, keeping her eyes on the relay screen, manipulating the waldos to turn the fetus. CAMERA BACK to ENLARGE SCENE taking in the relay screen so we see what she is doing.

BERNICE
All right, now: turning.

CAMERA IN ON SCREEN as we see the fetus being rotated. We HOLD a BEAT then CAMERA RISES to show us the entire operating theater. Hanging above and to the side of the surgeons is a large transparent bubble where spectators can sit to watch the operation below. CAMERA UP TO BUBBLE LEVEL and PULLS BACK to include bubble large in f.g. Then CAMERA IN on bubble till we see one man inside, sitting watching two screens: the first is a replica of the relay screen below, with the fetus being turned, the other is a small screen on a wristwatch comm-unit.

17 INT. BUBBLE – PAST BRATENAHL

As the screen with the fetus glows in the b.g. we COME IN PAST BRATENAHL to the screen on his wrist. Rowe is on the screen.

ROWE
What the hell are you doing on Sigma Draconis 5?.

BRATENAHL
I've got a friend here who might be able to give me a lead on Susan Calvin.

ROWE
You shouldn't have let her get away to begin with.

BRATENAHL
You saw the playback; what'd you expect me to do, fight off her side-boys and jump on her back?

ROWE
I've got faith in you, boy. You'll find her . . .

(beat)
And just to *prove* my faith, we did some digging, and Research came up with something that might help.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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17 CONTINUED:

ROWE (CONT'D.)
(beat)
So stop whining; this is the best story you'll ever luck onto. She helped change the face of the galaxy and then vanished; we know damned near nothing about her . . . or what she was to Byerley.
(beat)
This could win you the Prix Galactica.

BRATENAHL
It could win me a cell on Abraxis.

ROWE
Do you want what Research found, or don't you?

BRATENAHL
(resigned)
Sure. What is it?

ROWE
Segment of the personal memoirs of Alfred Lanning, first Director of U.S. Robots. Recorded in 2034, the year before he died. We had to call in some favors but the Lanning Archive coughed it up. I'll put it up on your screen. Just one thing, though . . .

BRATENAHL
What now?

ROWE
Just remember, kiddo: you win the Prix Galactica for this, and I want a chip off the statue.

BRATENAHL
How about the cell next to mine?

Rowe snorts, and his image vanishes. The screen scintillates and green readout appears:

STANDBY: TRANSMISSION OF DATA

But at that moment the relay screen from the operating stage below goes dark. Bratenahl looks down and sees Bernice Jolo leaving the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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17 CONTINUED: – 2

(CONT'D.)

theater, pulling off the skintight coverall and gloves—all one-piece disposable—as she goes out through the door that irises open to permit her exit. He speaks into the wrist mechanism:

BRATENAHL
Put the transmission on hold.

Then he gets up and leaves the bubble.

CUT TO:

18 INT. SEX-TANK – THROUGH MIST

A space without space. Pale milky mist floats everywhere. A naked man and woman, tastefully obscured by the mist, float around each other, kissing, touching, embracing. It is a no-gravity sleeping tank, in this case a rendezvous for Bratenahl and Bernice Jolo. CAMERA IN ON THEM.

BERNICE
Good to see you again.

BRATENAHL
Good to be back.

BERNICE
Any trouble with the teleport booth?

BRATENAHL
No, not this time. Not like a year ago.

BERNICE
(laughing lightly)
It was funny! They were reassembling your atoms all the way out to Ursa Major. Sure they didn't miss picking up something valuable?

BRATHENAHL
(ruefully)
Thing I like best about your sense of humor is that it's so black it slops over into the ultraviolet.

She rolls over him, they turn and turn in the weightless air.

BERNICE
Okay, now tell me what brought you back to me. I know it isn't sex.

(CONTINUED:)

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18 CONTINUED:

BRATHENAHL
A base canard. I came like a shooting star, bearing my heart before me, a slave to your wonderfulness, just to rifle your privates.

BERNICE
An A for performance, but you flunk for purple prose. Now, come *on*, Bob, what do you want from me?

BRATHENAHL
An in to meet Susan Calvin.

Bernice shoves away from him. Because they are weightless and every action has an equal and opposite reaction, he sails across the tank and brings up short against the soft inner surface. He gives a squeal.

BERNICE
What a vermicious slug you are.

He swims back to her, pushing off from the wall.

BRATHENAHL
Hold it a minute . . . listen to me . . .

BERNICE
(furious)
I can't believe you'd try to use me like that! It is absolutely loathsome that you remembered an idle remark I made two years ago and just *waited* to spring it on me.

BRATHENAHL
I remember *everything*, dammit! I have an eidetic memory; is it my fault?

BERNICE
My *God*, what a shit! Listen, Bratenahl, you wretch, I saw Susan Calvin *once*, just once in my whole life, when my father went to Brazil, Old Earth and operated on her. She won't even remember who I *am*!

(CONTINUED:)

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18 CONTINUED: – 2

BRATENAHL
She'll remember. She remembers everything.

BERNICE
How the hell do *you* know?

He is quiet. They float there close together. She looks at his face. There is something reflective and troubling in his expression. It softens her anger.

BRATENAHL
(quietly)
I met her. At Byerley's funeral.

She studies him.

BERNICE
My ego's bruised, but you'd better tell me about this.

CAMERA PULLS BACK as they roll slowly in the tank and we

DISSOLVE THRU MIST TO:

19 INT. MAGNUM HOTEL ROOM – NIGHT

Bratenahl sits in a formfit chair that seems to take his shape. He speaks into the wrist mechanism.

BRATENAHL
This is for Rowe, *Cosmos* Magazine.
(beat)
I've got someone who once met Susan Calvin, who might be able to get me an audience with her. But it'll take some time, and I'm going to teleport back to Old Earth in the morning to see if I can get to her on my own.

He punches some heat-sensitive plates in the table beside the chair, a slot opens and a drink in an ultramodern glass rises. He picks it up, the slot closes, and he sips.

BRATENAHL
Okay, run that tape for me now. Put it up on the big screen.

He turns in the chair and CAMERA SHOOTS PAST HIM to a large section of wall that suddenly rolls back to reveal a screen.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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19 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)

The room dims. Light from the screen washes his features. A read-out line in green appears:

STANDBY: TRANSMISSION OF DATA

CAMERA IN ON SCREEN as the line wipes and an ANNOUNCER'S VOICE speaks.

ANNOUNCER
Alfred Lanning, 1952 to 2035. First Director of U.S. Robot Corporation, renamed U.S. Robots and Mechanical Men. This is Volume 15 of the archive memoirs.

The screen flickers and we see a very old man, lying in a bed, speaking to the CAMERA. It is ALFRED LANNING. He is wasted, clearly not long for life, but furiously intent in saying everything he has to say before he dies.

LANNING
The first time I saw Susan Calvin, she was six years old. Her father was my second assistant manager for development. His first wife had died in childbirth, and he had remarried. We became fairly close, but I didn't meet the child till 2000, when Edward Winslow Calvin pulled one of our first nonvocal robots off the line to serve as a nursemaid for his daughter.

The VOICE of LANNING slowly goes to ECHO CHAMBER and CAMERA MOVES IN steadily on the flickering screen image, until it becomes a random series of phosphor-dots, multicolored. The VOICE CONTINUES as CAMERA goes into the flickering dots.

CAMERA BACK:

20 CAMERA OUT TO FULL SHOT – CALVIN HOME – DAY

A futuristic living room. EDWARD CALVIN paces around, clearly disturbed. He is a slight man with a kind face and a mustache. Short, but well-built. He resembles, perhaps, Brian Donlevy. Solid warm good looks.

As he paces, his wife BELINDA CALVIN works with a small robot mechanical, a robomek. It is scurrying around the floor, up the

(MORE)

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(CONT'D.)

walls, cleaning, purring softly. She sits in a swivel chair of modern design directing it by voice command. She is clearly pissed-off at Edward Calvin.

EDWARD
You've got to stop acting like the Wicked Witch of the West, Belinda! Susan is getting more withdrawn each day.

BELINDA
(to the robomek)
You missed a spot in the corner. Go back and do it again.

The robomek scurries over, dips its vacuum snout into the corner and, with its rear section waggling, purrs up the dust. It looks like a cross between a child being told to stand in a corner and a puppy snuffling after a bone.

EDWARD
Where is it written in stone that a stepmother has to hate her husband's child?
(beat)
Robbie loves Susan. And more important, *she* loves *him*.
(beat)
Accept it, Belinda; and stop this rancor.

BELINDA
(to robomek)
Get the picture window.

The robomek scurries up the wall, extrudes a long segmented arm with a squeegee on the end and begins swabbing the big window of the living room. Through the window we can see spacious front yard, old maple tree, and under the tree, a little girl. Standing with her face to the tree, hiding her eyes. There are large clumps of bushes everywhere.

EDWARD
I'm *talking* to you! Can't you stop working that robomek and answer me?

BELINDA
(to robomek)
You're smearing. Be more careful.

(CONTINUED:)

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20 CONTINUED: – 2

CAMERA MOVES SLOWLY TOWARD WINDOW as Edward and Belinda are phased out of FRAME but we HEAR their conversation even as the action with them slips from the side and we BEGIN TO FOCUS THRU WINDOW on the little girl, and we DIMLY HEAR UNDER the SOUND of her counting.

SUSAN
(very faintly, like a subliminal melody)
Sixty-six, sixty-seven, sixty-eight . . .
(and continues seriatum)

Edward goes to Belinda and kneels before her.

EDWARD
Honey . . . *please!* I'm trying to hold it together, and you're making it tougher for me . . .

She looks at him, and begins to cry. He takes her in his arms.

BELINDA
They look at me when I go shopping; they say things under their breath. They're afraid, and *I'm* afraid . . . I don't hate Susan . . . I'm just *afraid*!

EDWARD
There's nothing to be afraid of. Robbie has a positronic brain, he *can't* defy the Three Laws . . . they'll understand that one day . . . they *must.*

BELINDA
Please, Edward, please send it back to the company.

EDWARD
(bitterly)
It's that damned Church of the Moral Flesh! Those damned crazies!

BELINDA
They're *not* crazy, they're afraid of robots . . . Reverend Soldash said . . .

EDWARD
(vehemently)
Be *damned* to what Soldash said, that
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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20 CONTINUED: – 3

EDWARD (CONT'D.)
hysterical fundamentalist! He ought to be running the Scopes Monkey Trial!

CAMERA THRU WINDOW with VOICE OF SUSAN rising and VOICES of Edward and Belinda fading. CAMERA TOWARD SUSAN.

21 TRUCKING SHOT – SUSAN CALVIN – REVERSE DIRECTION OF 20 – EXTERIOR – DAY

CAMERA COMING IN on SUSAN CALVIN, six years old, small even for her age, but with a child's voice that has a ring of strength in it. As CAMERA IN, if we strain very hard, we can see, past Susan leaning against the tree with her hand over her eyes, the elegant and futuristic Calvin home sitting on a short rise across a spacious lawn, heavy stands of bushes all around. And through the enormous bubble window, two vague figures holding each other in the living room.

SUSAN
Ninety-eight, ninety-nine . . . *one hundred!* Ready or not, here I come!

She turns away from the tree and looks DIRECTLY INTO CAMERA as we TRUCK IN AND STOP at CLOSEUP. Six-year-old lovely, but with the sharp eyes of a ferret. Susan Calvin, as a child; and we see the shadow of the woman-to-be. She looks around, seeking the one hiding, but nothing is in sight. She puts her fists on her hips with that special little-girl affrontedness.

SUSAN (CONT'D.)
(loud)
No fair! I told you *lotta* times, it's no fair goin' in the house!

She runs off as CAMERA REMAINS IN FIXED POSITION. She runs here, she runs there, runs toward the house, back into MEDIUM CLOSEUP. As she runs off to the left, we see movement from the middle of a huge clump of trees and bushes to the right. CAMERA COMES IN on the bushes just as ROBBIE emerges.

As he stalks out of the concealment of the bushes, we see why it was that Susan couldn't find him. He is close to seven feet tall, but his legs have the capacity to telescope themselves. He has extended himself to a height of ten or twelve feet, so the bulk of his body was hidden up high in the foliage of a small tree, while his legs

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

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21 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)

were concealed behind the boles of the trees there in the thicket. Now as he emerges, at the greater height, he begins to retract his legs in their tubular sections, and as he comes across the lawn he gets shorter, till he is his "normal" height of almost seven feet.

22 ANOTHER ANGLE – MED. LONG – INCLUDING ROBBIE & SUSAN

As the robot comes on fast across the distance between the bushes and the counting tree. He moves with an awkward and faintly stiff—yet curiously graceful—lope.

23 CU – SUSAN

as she hears something. She whirls and her eyes widen.

SUSAN
(shrieking)
Wait, Robbie! No fair! You promised you wouldn't run till I found you!

24 SAME AS 22

As she rushes toward the robot. He is moving very fast, but then, within ten feet of the goal tree his pace slows to the merest step and Susan, with one last burst of speed, lurches past him to slap the tree. She turns, laughing.

SUSAN
Ha ha, *ha* ha: Robbie can't ru-un. Robbie can't ru-un! I can beat him any day!

The robot cannot speak, but it pantomimes shame and chagrin, and begins edging away as Susan comes toward him, till they are in a chase, with the little girl running in circles trying to catch the huge metal man. She tries to grab him, but he manages to stay out of her reach till suddenly, in one swift movement he spins on her, lifts her high over his metal head and swings her around. She squeals with utter delight.

SUSAN (CONT'D.)
Gimme a ride! Robbie, gimme a good ride!

The robot swings her to his shoulders and, holding her very securely, begins loping up the slope toward the Calvin home as CAMERA GOES WITH. Susan begins playing space pirates. She aims her finger as if it were a gun, and makes firing sounds.

(CONTINUED:)

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SUSAN (CONT'D.)
I'm a space pilot! There's the space pirates, Robbie . . . over there . . . ack-ack-ack!

As they whirl past the house, the front door irises open and Belinda stands there, misery and horror on her face. Edward Calvin is behind her, looking strained and troubled.

BELINDA
Susan!

The robot and the child whirl past and Belinda takes a step outside. She calls more frantically.

BELINDA (CONT'D.)
Susan! Susan! Robbie, *stop!* Come here at once, put her down!

The robot glides to a halt, turns and comes to the adults. He reaches up, swings the child down and stands silently waiting.

BELINDA (CONT'D.)
Why don't you come when I call?

SUSAN
(petulant)
Awwww! We were playin' space pirates.

BELINDA
(*to* Robbie)
You may go, Robbie.
(beat)
Susan doesn't need you now.
(beat)
And don't come back till I call you.

SUSAN
(loudly)
Awww, *please!* Let Robbie stay. He won't make a sound, he won't even move, will you, Robbie?

The robot nods his massive head up and down. There is a charming, somewhat winsome manner in the robot's gargantuan movements.

BELINDA
Susan, stop it at once! If you don't obey me you're not going to see Robbie for a
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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24 CONTINUED: – 2

BELINDA (CONT'D.)
week. Now come inside and have your lunch.

Susan looks imploringly at her father, who smiles a sad little smile; then she looks up at Robbie, hugs his long metal leg, and then, with her head down, slouches past into the house. Belinda looks once at the robot with undisguised loathing, then turns and follows Susan.

Edward Calvin looks at Robbie. They stand there a moment.

EDWARD
(chummily, but sadly)
Life isn't easy for a nursemaid, is it, old son? Can you feel pain in that wonderful platinum-iridium sponge you call a brain?
(beat)
Well, you're not alone, Robbie. There are worse things than getting rusty.

He turns and goes into the house. The robot—whose head movements in response to Edward Calvin's words have been mutely responsive—stands there staring at the house like a faithful dog left out in the cold. He stands there, then his head slowly turns and we see, through a bubble window, little Susan Calvin, her nose pressed to the lucite, staring out miserably. They stare at each other longingly, with devotion, as we:

DISSOLVE TO:

25 INT. CHURCH OF THE MORTAL FLESH – NIGHT

CLOSE ON THE SYMBOL OF THE CHURCH. It is a metal and acrylic sculpture. Ominous yet evocative. A mound of gears and girders and rusted bits of metal as a base, with a muscular human arm emerging from the pile, its length extended toward the heavens, fingers spread, reaching. CAMERA PULLS BACK after a long study of this symbol, as we HEAR OVER the VOICE of Rev. Malachi Soldash:

SOLDASH
(charismatic; messianic)
They *tell* us these creatures cannot do harm. They *tell* us the thundering metal thinks. They *tell* us it obeys three vague commandments. But I tell *you* God made
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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25 CONTINUED:

SOLDASH (CONT'D.)

Man in his image, not thundering metal!

(beat)

I tell *you* that God never created the opposable thumb and raised Man from all fours to set his hand at the making of metal creatures without souls!

(beat)

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath." The Lord Thy God gave *that* as the second of His Commandments to Moses atop Mt. Sinai . . . and there's nothing vague *about* it! It says *lay off*! It says don't do it! It says those who *don't* lay off are damned!

As the preceding speech REVERBERATES OVER the CAMERA PULLS BACK from the symbol as FRAME EXPANDS and we see the interior of the Church of the Mortal Flesh. It is an enormous cocoonlike cavern, without sharp angles or corners. Made of spun plastic like the inside of an irregularly-shaped egg, its walls are flesh-pink and the apse arches up into darkness, where the symbol shines against the shadows. CAMERA COMES DOWN through that darkness to show us REVEREND MALACHI SOLDASH apparently suspended in midair on an anti-gravity disc with slim lucite railings to keep him from falling off. He stands there, in midair, delivering his sermon as CAMERA BACK AND DOWN revealing the enormity of the Church. A group of six men and women sits in a semi-circle on a high podium to one side of the nave. It is an incredibly dramatic setting. The nave and atrium are filled with the CONGREGATION who see Soldash not only in the flesh, suspended above and in front of them, high up where the altar would usually be in a basilica, but they also see him on individual video screens set into the backs of the pews, one for each parishioner. And Soldash's image is enhanced by closeups, key-shots of emotionally slanted stock footage, and shots of each of the six men and women on the high podium when he mentions them. CAMERA BACK AND BACK to show us this is a gigantic church.

26 thru 37 SERIES OF KEYNOTE SHOTS – INDICATED SUBJECTS IN CU

Soldash in CU. Handsome in a craggy way. He is a very contem-

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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26 thru 37 CONTINUED:

poraneous figure, yet charismatic in a hellfire and brimstone idiom. Hip, but frightening. Powerful. (The memory conjures up George C. Scott in *The Hanging Tree*, 1958.) His clothing is not fabric, but a multicolored aura of fog and lights that swirl around him, limning his body yet concealing it. Flickers of gold and crimson and cerulean blue that shoot through as though seen under oil.

SOLDASH
(exhorting)
But *you* say to me . . . "These *things*, these unliving constructs, they can clean my house, they can watch my children, they can work in the big factories, so I can take it easy, so I can be a lazy smoothyguts and take the dippership for a weekend in Bora Bora." And *I* say to *you*, forget God! Forget God's clear injunction! Look at the truth, that metal monsters will take your jobs, take your money, take the food from your children's mouths! Listen to what the Unions say. Here is Sister Madelaine Groth, President of the International Allied Trade Labor Guild . . .

And he points toward the podium with the six men and women sitting in holy splendor. Light seems to flow off his fingertip and bathe one of the women. MADELAINE GROTH stands.

CAMERA GOES WITH THE LIGHT BEAM to CU on GROTH. She is a sturdy-looking woman in her early thirties, rugged jaw, no-nonsense manner. Not masculine, but tough-looking.

GROTH
Brothers and sisters, my statisticians have shown by *irrefutable* numbers that the introduction of robots into the work force will rob 35,000 people a month of their livelihood.

MATCH ON GROTH'S FACE, as seen in one of the video screens in the pews. CAMERA PULLS BACK from the screen to show us Belinda Calvin, wearing a hooded dress that half-obscures her face, sitting in the pew, listening. She is clearly frightened. At the message. And at the knowledge that *she* is one of the people under

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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(CONT'D.)

attack here . . . and she doesn't want to be. She wants to believe in the Church.

As Groth's VOICE is HEARD OVER in both FILTER from the video screen and in actuality there in the basilica, producing a strange reverberatory effect, the SCREEN shows men and women in breadlines, selling apples on street corners, rooting in garbage pails, begging . . . STOCK FOOTAGE of the Depression.

INTERCUT AMONG GROTH SPEAKING, VIDEO IMAGE OF GROTH SPEAKING, STOCK DEPRESSION FOOTAGE, BELINDA CALVIN & SOLDASH as we *begin to accelerate the intercuts . . .*

CU – SOLDASH

SOLDASH
Brother Karl Bunchi, the American Morality Congress . . .

He points; CAMERA GOES WITH the beam of light to illuminate another of the six in the podium setting, KARL BUNCHI, a thin, cadaverous, Ichabod Crane-like man. He is bathed in Soldash's light and stands, speaks:

BUNCHI
The blurring of the sexes . . . the decay and rot of moral fiber . . . our young people giving free rein to lechery, lasciviousness, arrogance and disrespect . . .

Repeat of previous sequence with Groth, this time with Bunchi on the screen, Belinda watching, getting more distraught, more horrified. Stock footage of kids having wild parties, nude bathing, wild abandon, etc.

INTERCUT AMONG BUNCHI SPEAKING, VIDEO IMAGE OF BUNCHI SPEAKING, STOCK LECHERY FOOTAGE, BELINDA, GROTH, SOLDASH as the *intercuts accelerate faster and faster . . .*

CU – SOLDASH

SOLDASH
General Lester Joe McCaffrey of the Fighting 65th . . .

He points. Light beam. CAMERA WITH. Huge, rugged, bearded man in his fifties, wearing full-dress uniform, stands, begins exhorting.

(CONTINUED:)

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McCAFFREY
War among metal men . . . unnatural slaughter . . . merciless armies of robots . . . rape and pillage . . . the new apocalypse . . . scorched earth . . .

Repeat of previous sequences with Groth and Bunchi, this time with McCAFFREY on the screen, Belinda watching, almost in tears, trembling, trying to keep herself concealed. Stock footage of explosions, buildings crumbling, robot soldiers moving in ranks, muzzles of flame rifles exploding, the classic shot of the crying child sitting in rubble, etc.

INTERCUT AMONG McCAFFREY SPEAKING, McCAFFREY ON SCREEN, GROTH SPEAKING, EXHORTING, BUNCHI DECLAIMING, WAR FOOTAGE, BELINDA WILD-EYED & SOLDASH, SOLDASH, SOLDASH as the *intercuts whirl faster and faster and faster . . .*

INTERCUT CU SOLDASH POINTING, LIGHT STREAMING.

INTERCUT ANOTHER OF SIX STANDING, ARMS RAISED.

INTERCUT THE SYMBOL BLAZING IN DARKNESS.

INTERCUT BELINDA ALMOST HYSTERICAL NOW.

INTERCUT BUNCHI. INTERCUT LANNING AS DEVIL.

INTERCUT GROTH. INTERCUT EDWARD CALVIN AS DEVIL.

INTERCUT CONGREGATION GOING WILD. INTERCUT BELINDA AGOG.

SMASH-CUT TO:

38 INT. CALVIN BEDROOM – NIGHT

Edward Calvin sitting up in bed, wearing pajamas. Belinda rushing about fully-clothed, as we saw her in the basilica, but now the hood has been thrown back, as if she has just come in from outdoors.

BELINDA
(hysterical)
I don't care! I can't stand it any more! I'm not going to be a guinea pig for U.S. Robots! That soulless *thing* has to go!

EDWARD
(stunned)
Belinda!

(CONTINUED:)

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38 CONTINUED:

BELINDA
I want it out, today, this morning; or I'm filing for dissolution of this marriage! Do you understand me?

He flings back the covers, gets out of bed barefoot. He goes to her.

EDWARD
Belinda, *stop this!* Those crazy fanatics have you terrified. It's all lies . . . the positronic brain of the robots *can't* . . .

BELINDA
(flailing, screams)
No! It's against God and Man!

EDWARD
Stop this! Stop it, you'll wake Susan . . .

He tries to grab her, to quiet her, but suddenly she is wild with hysteria, flailing at him, spiraling higher and higher into a self-induced madness. They struggle, she has uncommon strength, slaps him, again and again, he tries to hold her, they fall, roll on the floor, her voice rises, inarticulate. CAMERA IN ON THEM IN CU.

Edward manages to pin her, and now, helpless, she dissolves in wretched tears, terrified, chagrined, a wreck. He holds her, there on the floor, begins rocking her gently.

EDWARD (CONT'D.)
(soothing)
Okay. Okay. It's okay, honey. Shhh. Take it easy. Don't cry, don't cry, shhhh, Robbie goes back today . . . I'll talk to Alfred Lanning . . . it'll be all right . . .

CAMERA PULLS BACK AND UP as SCENE SHOT THRU FILTER to produce gradually more misty look and CAMERA KEEPS GOING UP AND UP AND BACK looking down on them smaller and smaller there on the floor, rocking back and forth, more and more pitiful as the distance increases.

DISSOLVE TO:

39 INT. CALVIN LIVING ROOM – EVENING

as we HEAR VOICE OF SUSAN OVER:

(CONTINUED:)

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39 CONTINUED:

SUSAN (V.O)
Robbie? Robbie? C'mon, where you hidin'? Don't be mean, Robbie!

Through an archway we can see Belinda setting a formal dinner in the dining room. The huge wall-screen video is on and a NEWSCASTER is speaking as we see newsreel footage of a mob destroying a shop that sells robot home implements. Through this scene we HEAR the NEWSCAST UNDER.

NEWSCASTER
Another wave of vandalism against U.S. Robots Corporation shops broke out in Detroit today as mobs swept over three retail outlets, destroying property valued at close to one million dollars . . .

Susan comes into scene, looking in closets that open as she approaches them and claps her hands. She is looking for Robbie. She seems terribly upset that she cannot find her playmate.

SUSAN
Robbie? I'm gonna *spank* you if you don't come out right *now*!

Edward Calvin comes in, sees her and his face tightens.

EDWARD
Honey, come here a minute.

She comes to him. He sits down in a formfit chair and pulls her onto his lap. In b.g. we see Belinda lighting candles on the table, setting up crystal goblets, all the business of a formal dinner, but playing strictly in b.g. as she keeps an eye on her husband talking to the child.

40 2-SHOT – SUSAN & EDWARD CALVIN

She sits on his lap, looking worried. Calvin is torn by emotions.

SUSAN
Daddy, where's Robbie?

EDWARD
Robbie went away, honey.

SUSAN
Went away where?

EDWARD
He . . . he just walked away.

(CONTINUED:)

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40 CONTINUED:

SUSAN
(innocent)
He did that?

EDWARD
Sometimes Robbies do that, baby.

SUSAN
(certain)
He wouldn't do that.

Calvin hugs her, presses her close to him.

SUSAN (CONT'D.)
I know he wouldn't. He din't say a thing 'bout it. He'd've *told* me, Daddy.

EDWARD
I bought you a present, baby.

SUSAN
Maybe he's sick, huh? Maybe he's feelin' bad somewhere, Daddy.
(brighter)
We gotta *fine* him, Daddy! We gotta go look for Robbie, he must be *some*where, feelin' bad.

She starts to struggle off his lap. Calvin holds her.

EDWARD
(intensely)
Listen to me, Susan! Now Robbie is gone, do you hear? He's gone off to work somewhere else, and I brought you a present, a new friend.

In the b.g. Belinda busies, and the newscast of the riot plays on. Susan gets tearful.

SUSAN
(crankily)
No! He wouldn't *do* that; he's my friend. *She* made him go 'way!

Belinda stiffens in b.g. Susan doesn't look at her, but tosses her head. Calvin gets tougher.

EDWARD
Stop it, Susan! Robbie is just a robot, just

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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40 CONTINUED: – 2

EDWARD(CONT'D.)
a tool, he's no more important than Mommy's robomek or the dishwasher . . .

SUSAN
(incensed)
No! He's a *person* like you 'n me!

Belinda suddenly comes in from the dining room, a tureen of something steaming in her hands. Her face is filled with horror.

BELINDA
Shut up! Don't ever say that. Don't let me *ever* hear you say that again, don't ever *say* that!

EDWARD
Belinda! For God's sake!

BELINDA
(distraught, catches herself, then murmurs)
Yes . . . for God's sake . . .

She turns and goes back into the dining room. Susan is now on the verge of hysterics herself.

SUSAN
(whispers)
Daddy, *please* . . . I want Robbie.

EDWARD
He's gone, Susan, and that's that. He's not coming back. Not now, not ever.

Susan starts to cry.

EDWARD (CONT'D.)
Look: a *new* friend . . .

He claps his hands and the front vestibule entrance irises, and in bounds a fuzzy little puppy, cute as a bug. It frolics around, leaping up on Susan. She starts to cry harder, and when the puppy pays more attention to her she screams.

41 REVERSE ANGLE – FROM DINING ROOM – WITH BELINDA

as she stops puttering with the now completely-set formal dinner table. She stumps in, grabs Susan off Calvin's lap and swings her up.

(CONTINUED:)

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41 CONTINUED:

BELINDA
That will do! You're going to your room.

EDWARD
Belinda! Let her get to know the dog at least!

BELINDA
Lanning and his wife will be here in a minute; I'm not having this evening ruined by a spoiled child!

She carries Susan, still howling, into another room and we see them rising to the second floor on an inclined slope that must be a conveyor belt for people. CAMERA STAYS WITH EDWARD CALVIN. He looks destroyed.

EDWARD
(softly)
She'll forget . . . a few days, she'll forget . . .

He is talking to the prancing puppy leaping at his knees. Silence in the living room, except for the ongoing newscast with newsreel footage of the riots, the start of the Robot Pogroms.

NEWSCASTER
Driven by hatred and fear of loss of jobs, this mob in Macon, Georgia put the torch to . . .

EDWARD
(very softly)
In the name of God, puppy, in the name of God . . .

DISSOLVE THRU TO:

42 SAME AS 21 – EXT. CALVIN HOME

Susan sits under the tree, plucking at the grass idly. She looks forlorn and miserable. The puppy capers nearby, unnoticed.

DISSOLVE TO:

43 INT. CALVIN HOME – PAST EDWARD & BELINDA

SHOT THROUGH FRONT WINDOW to Scene 42 setup of Susan under the tree. They stand with their backs to CAMERA, talking.

(CONTINUED:)

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43 CONTINUED:

BELINDA
We could take the dippership to Jamaica; she'd love Disney Island.

EDWARD
Please.

BELINDA
I've tried everything; you've got to stop blaming me.

EDWARD
I don't blame you.

BELINDA
This thing can destroy us, Edward.

EDWARD
One more triumph for the Reverend Soldash.

BELINDA
Leave the Church out of this. It's the will of the people.

EDWARD
I suppose that was the justification for the Spanish Inquisition, too.

BELINDA
Is it bad at the company . . . ?

EDWARD
It's bad. Unless Robertson's pull in Congress works, unless they pass the bill, the Corporation may go under.

BELINDA
No one wants them, they're afraid of them.

EDWARD
(wearily)
I've heard all this, Belinda. I have to put up with it all day, spare me the party line when I'm at home.

Through the window we see Susan rise and walk desultorily across the grass toward the house. The puppy follows.

(CONTINUED:)

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BELINDA
Is Lanning still angry with you?

EDWARD
He's not delighted. Returning Robbie was just another slap in the face. Everyone over there is jumpy.

BELINDA
What are you going to do?

EDWARD
Maybe now's a good time to go off on my own.

BELINDA
(nervously)
Stay with the Corporation. We need the security.

He turns to her, looks at her for the first time.

EDWARD
(ironically)
My God, dearest heart, you are an absolute *masterpiece* of contradictions. Stay with the Godless Corporation, they extend the hand with the paycheck.

BELINDA
When this is all over, U.S. Robot can convert to other products, good things that people need.

EDWARD
Let me guess: that's out of the mouth of labor messiah Madelaine Groth.
(beat)
What do you suggest U.S.R. produce? Paint-by-the-numbers portraits of Reverend Malachi Soldash? Cunning replicas of the Church symbol?

BELINDA
Here she comes.

EDWARD
(wearily)
Right. Here she comes, there we go.

DISSOLVE THRU TO:

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44 INT. CALVIN LIVING ROOM

On Susan, sitting gloomily, not really watching a cartoon show on the wall-sized video screen.

DISSOLVE TO:

45 INT. AIRCAR – DAY

Susan in the back seat, looking out the window without interest. In the front seat Calvin and Belinda sit silently, as the automatic controls of the car blip this color and that color on the computer panel, projecting their course down the speedway. The countryside rushes past very fast. There is only the SOUND of air rushing past, otherwise it is silent. Maintain this silence for several beats, then:

BELINDA
I hope this works.

EDWARD
If you have a better suggestion . . .

BELINDA
I don't want to fight. I merely said I hope it works.

EDWARD
If she can stop thinking of him as a person it may bring her out of it.

BELINDA
I don't like going there.

EDWARD
You can always go to the Church and ask for expungement later.

She gives him a sharp, sudden look of revilement.

46 LONG SHOT – MOVING THROUGH

as the aircar speeds past us on the metal ribbon of road, without wheels, supported on a cushion of air, almost silently save for the passage of wind. It ships past and vanishes down the road.

CUT TO:

47 EXT. U.S. ROBOTS BUILDING – ESTABLISHING

Huge and modernistic. A large ultra-serif sign indicates this is the U.S. ROBOT CORPORATION HIGHLAND PARK DIVISION. The aircar pulls into the parking lot. The three riders emerge and walk toward the building.

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48 INT. ASSEMBLY AREA – DAY

A smooth, sleek, anodized assembly line down there, stretching off into infinity. Huge machines, bubbling vats, computer consoles, and working on the line not humans, but robots. We are up on a walkway high above the assemblage. Calvin, Belinda and a GUIDE, a young woman in her twenties. Susan walks with them, not really paying any attention.

BELINDA
(to Susan)
You see, Susan, this is where they build the things.

EDWARD
Robots. Positronic robots, not things.

BELINDA
Whatever. Do you see, Susan?

The child doesn't respond.

GUIDE
This is the torso assemblage unit. The positronic brains are imprinted in sub-sections under this area and then come up through a feeder system for insertion . . .
(she looks embarrassed)
You know all this, Mr. Calvin. I feel like a fool conducting you the way I would some foreign businessman.

He smiles tightly. He is obviously nervous. He reassures her.

EDWARD
This is the first time for my wife and Susan. Don't worry about it.

BELINDA
(interested, despite herself)
Everything is moving so *fast.*

Overhead conveyors with assembled robot bodies zip along very speedily. The robots work at a blurred pace. (This is important!)

GUIDE
These drone robots are model 41s. Their reflexes are very good and, of course, this is fairly routine work.

(CONTINUED:)

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48 CONTINUED:

EDWARD
It would take three hundred men and women a week to do what this cadre of robots does in eight hours.

They walk along the catwalk. There is a staircase that leads down onto the floor below. They pass it. Now they are right above a group of robots laser welding torso shells together as the assembled bodies keep zipping past behind them.

BELINDA
There don't seem to be many safety precautions.

GUIDE
(proudly)
Few are needed. The drones are aware of the conveyor and stay out of the line of passage.

BELINDA
But what about human beings?

EDWARD
What humans?

GUIDE
This is fully automated. There are no people required.

Belinda's mouth tightens. It is as if she is hearing Labor leader Groth saying the robots will take human jobs. But we only see the tenseness for a moment, as Susan suddenly shrieks:

SUSAN
Robbie!

CAMERA WHIPS TO SUSAN and her face, suddenly lit with life and utter devotion. It is the happiest we've seen her in some time. CAMERA WHIPS AROUND and ZOOMS DOWN to the floor of the assembly unit. All of the robots look alike, but only one's head suddenly jerks up, looks around, and then fastens on the little girl. It is Robbie! We can tell!

49 CAMERA WITH SUSAN – ARRIFLEX

She is screaming Robbie's name over and over with undisguised joy. Suddenly she breaks away and rushes for the stairway down to the assemblage floor.

(CONTINUED:)

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49 CONTINUED:

EDWARD
Susan! No!

The child rushes down the stairs, almost falling, grabbing the rail, dashing down, jumping the last three steps to land on the floor. The conveyor keeps whipping past overhead, the incredibly heavy robot bodies hanging like slaughtered beef from the hooks. She starts running toward Robbie.

50 EXT. CU – ROBBIE

HOLDING his photoreflector eyes large. There is a light in them as he looks INTO CAMERA.

51 REVERSE ANGLE – PAST ROBBIE

as Susan dashes toward him.

52 SAME AS 50

On the eyes. Moving in to them in EXTREMELY TIGHT CU.

53 SPECIAL EFFECTS SHOT – THE SCENE

THROUGH ROBBIE'S EYES. Like the multifaceted eyes of a bee, we see a hundred octagonal pictures of Susan running toward CAMERA. The view shifts, and we see the conveyor belt of bodies very near the child . . . she is weaving right into the path. We HEAR the SOUND of relays clicking, though Robbie has no relays, only printed paths in the positronic brain.

54 WITH SUSAN

as she rushes with arms open at Robbie. And behind and above her, here comes one of the many-ton bodies of an assembled robot, barreling down on her, clearly on a path to smash her. Very fast.

In an instant Robbie loses all his jerky movements and throws himself forward. In a few strides of his elongated, telescoping legs, he is on her. In one move he sweeps her up in his arms, holds her out of the way and the conveyor carries the hurtling body directly into him as Robbie half-turns, braces himself and gets smashed hard on the shoulder. One of his arms is ripped off as the torso goes whipping by. He is thrown off his feet, but even in falling holds the child out of danger. He skids to a halt on the floor, Susan still upheld and stunned but unhurt.

55 thru 59 SERIES OF INTERCUTS – REACTION SHOTS

EDWARD CALVIN screams Susan's name, breaks for the stairs.

(CONTINUED:)

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55 thru 59 CONTINUED:

BELINDA CALVIN struck dumb with horror, frozen in place.

ALFRED LANNING—a much younger version of the aged, dying man we saw in the memoir cassette Scene 19—as he comes through the portal at the end of the walkway and sees the whole thing: thunderstruck and shaken.

SUSAN stunned but hardly frightened, still with that awesome look of love at having found Robbie.

THROUGH ROBBIE'S EYES in that bee-faceted multivision of octagonal segmentation . . . looking across laterally from his supine position, at the child he loves . . . safe.

60 FULL SHOT – THE SCENE

as Lanning shouts into his wrist-communicator.

LANNING
Control! Shut down the torso assembly unit. Now! Right now! This is Alfred Lanning. I take full responsibility.

And Edward Calvin practically swims down the stairs, the female Guide right behind him. Belinda still frozen on the walkway above them. The robots have stopped work. The conveyor slams to a halt, the torsos swaying like alien artifacts on a clothesline. CAMERA DOWN as Edward slides to his knees to grasp Susan. Robbie looks up to see it is safe to let go of the child. He nods in almost an old-man way as he sees it's Susan father. Susan isn't even ruffled. She grabs Calvin around the neck with joy, laughing and squealing.

SUSAN
Daddy! Daddy, it's Robbie! See?

EDWARD
(almost in tears)
Yes, honey . . . yes, yes, I *see*!

Then he looks up at the walkway, at Belinda. There are tears in his eyes and a new defiance.

EDWARD (CONT'D.)
I see! Do *you* see? Do you?

She nods slowly. She cannot argue now. And she stares down at the trio as Alfred Lanning comes up to her.

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61 REVERSE PAST CALVIN – RISING BOOM SHOT

As CAMERA COMES IN on Lanning, we see him speaking to Belinda but HEAR his VOICE OVER, divorced from his image.

LANNING (V.O.)
(resonating, echo)
That was the first time I ever saw Susan Calvin. I learned what had happened later, of course. He knew that robot had been put back on the line. But I never authorized that guided tour. The child might have been killed. It was just the kind of attachment between one of our units and a human that made for such public relations difficulties . . . and we were having serious problems in that area. It was the year 2000, the turn of the century . . . and the time of the Robot Pogroms.

CAMERA IN on Lanning's face as we

SUPERIMPOSE PROCESS SHOT:

62 SAME AS 19 – LANNING ON ARCHIVE CASSETTE

That flickering screen image of the dying Lanning, lying on his deathbed, relating his memoirs. TRIPLE EXPOSURE SUPER-IMPOSITION of the multicolored phosphor-dot transmission. HOLD BOTH SHOTS for several beats as speech preceding OVER, then FADE 61 SLOWLY going to transmission SHOT FULL as this is said by Lanning:

LANNING (V.O.)
Matters with Calvin were strained, in any case. The unit she called Robbie was repaired. It didn't much matter. I think it was lost during one of the riots . . .

The phosphor-dot transmission congeals into BLACK AND WHITE NEWSREEL FOOTAGE . . .

SOFT-EDGE WIPE TO:

63 NEWSREEL FOOTAGE – CITY STREET – DAY

A crowd of men and women has a robot that looks like Robbie backed against a brick wall. It has its hands up to protect itself,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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63 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)

but one woman hurls a brick that hits the robot high on the chest, smearing its anodized surface. OVER we HEAR the VOICE of LANNING in DISTORTED ECHO:

LANNING (V.O.) (DISTORTED)
"A robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm . . . A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws . . ."

The Robbie robot tries to break out of the circle, but we now realize it has been trapped in an alley filled with refuse, with high walls. It tries to raise itself on its telescoping legs to get out of trouble, but a man with a laser welding torch rushes in and burns one of the joints in a leg. The robot is trapped at its usual height. A woman throws gasoline on it. The laser welder hits the gas with a burst of light and heat. The gas catches. The robot is washed by flame at its lowest level. In rushes a man with a ball-bat. He swings hard—he's a *big* man—swings like a man at a carnival trying to hit the gong on the strength tester. Another man with a huge spike-driving sledgehammer swings and crushes the chest cavity. A man with a pickaxe buries it in Robbie's thoracic region. Then the arms are broken . . . the head shattered . . . the robot goes down and the mob moves in through the flames to finish the job as we

SUPERIMPOSE PROCESS SHOT:

64 SAME AS 19/62 – LANNING ON CASSETTE

SPECIAL EFFECT of transmission phosphor-dot that HOLDS for several beats as the black and white newsreel footage of Robbie's destruction fades. The transmission effect fades and we are looking at old Alfred Lanning, lying on his deathbed, speaking to CAMERA.

LANNING
Old man Robertson, the founder, pulled every string he had in Congress. National Guard was called out. Saved the Corporation at the final hour. But they passed the Robot Restriction Laws, it was the only way to placate the Church and the Unions. No robots on Earth.

(CONTINUED:)

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64 CONTINUED:

He begins to cough weakly. A white-sleeved arm reaches in to touch his shoulder and we HEAR the VOICE of a DOCTOR:

DOCTOR (O.S.)
Mr. Lanning . . . that's enough for now . . .

LANNING
(cantankerously)
Loose ends! There are loose ends! I have to say this . . . get away from me with that stuff . . .

The hand vanishes. Lanning pulls himself together.

LANNING (CONT'D.)
What was I . . . oh, yes . . .
(beat)
Edward Winslow Calvin died four years later. A young man, really. Just forty. Always felt bad about that: can't recall just why, but I never was very good terms with him after that business with Susan and her nursemaid.
(beat)
I didn't see Susan Calvin again till she was twenty-one. That was in 2015, when she came to work for me at U.S. Robots. Always felt a lot of loyalty from her . . . always thought she wanted to make good there because her father had failed.
(beat)
Thank God we had space travel. The Restriction Laws didn't stop us from using the units out there . . . saved the Corporation . . .

He begins coughing again. There is a flicker of movement on the tape, as if medical personnel were hurrying to take corrective steps, and then the screen goes to BLACK and a green readout line appears:

END TRANSMISSION

The screen is dark. There is a click as it shuts itself off. CAMERA BACK OUT OF SCREEN.

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65 ANOTHER ANGLE – FEATURING BRATENAHL – NIGHT

He still sits in the Magnum Hotel room where we left him in Scene 19. Still in the formfit chair, now staring at the darkened screen. It is dark in the room, we can barely see him. He stands. Walks to the huge bubble window in the room and passes his hand in front of the surface. It has been opaque. Now it clears and we SHOOT PAST HIM to a view of Sigma Draconis 5 at night. An alien view with three moons hanging in the night sky. He stands silently, staring out at the alien night. We HEAR a warm, masculine VOICE speak in the silence of the room. It seems to come from everywhere.

VOICE OF ROOM
Mr. Bratenahl? Excuse me, sir.

BRATENAHL
(distantly)
Yes?

VOICE OF ROOM
Just confirming the schedule of your teleportation transmission to Old Earth tomorrow, sir.
(beat)
Control would appreciate your being on the ready-line by 4100 hours.

BRATENAHL
No problem.

VOICE OF ROOM
That will be a relay transmission—three stages, sir. Via Rasket Beta 9, Mars Central, and then in to the Novo Brasilia booth on Old Earth.

BRATENAHL
I'd like to be left alone, please.

There is a moment's pause as the Room gauges the emotion in his voice.

VOICE OF ROOM
(soothing)
I perceive a touch of melancholy in your voice, sir. Is there anything the Magnum Hotel can do to make your night a little easier?

He turns to the Room. We see his face. It is strained.

(CONTINUED:)

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65 CONTINUED:

BRATENAHL
Look, Room: it ain't melancholy, it's contemplation, reflective. I'm not a potential suicide. So stop hanging around like a doting parent. Go away.

VOICE OF ROOM
No offense intended, sir.

BRATENAHL
None taken. Go away.

VOICE OF ROOM
I am, after all, sir, just a congeries of mnemonic *(pronounced nee-mon-ic)* circuits. Occasionally I miss a nuance in the human voice—

BRATENAHL
(yells)
By damn, if you don't get the hell out of here—!

There is an audible sighing sound as the Room leaves him alone. Bratenahl turns back to the window; we HOLD on his back, as he stares out at the alien night.

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
(to the night)
I know you value your privacy, Dr. Susan Calvin; so do I.
(beat)
But I'm coming, anyhow.
(beat)
I need to know.
(beat)
I . . . just . . . need . . . to . . . know.

CAMERA HOLDS him staring into the distance as the three moons of Sigma Draconis 5 hurtle through the amethyst sky.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

66 NOVO BRASILIA TELEPORT RECEPTION AREA – DAY

ON THE BOOTH set in the center of a beautiful plaza, with the inlaid tile sidewalks the Brazilians favor. Bright sunlight, and the booth—as described in Scene 14—a dark and alien presence. We
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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66 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)

see the telltale scintillance deep in its interior that indicates someone's atoms are being hurled in a tracer-like line at us. And then in PROCESS we see Robert Bratenahl coalesce. And he's there. He steps out of the booth, a little disoriented. He has, after all, been shot halfway across the galaxy.

67 LONG SHOT – THE PLAZA

Novo Brasilia, in all its splendor. Spread out, with the jungle in the near distance. The Xingú River, mightier than the Hudson and twice as long, snakes among the impenetrable stands of virgin timber, so clotted thick it seems to be a carpet. And down there, the plaza, the booth, and Robert Bratenahl. Tiny. Not as tiny as the mote that is Old Earth in the enormity of the cosmos, but tiny, very tiny for all that. We see a figure striding across the plaza toward Bratenahl. CAMERA COMES DOWN. We see them shake hands, then walk off together.

DISSOLVE TO:

68 ON THE XINGÚ RIVER – DAY

as a dugout canoe being paddled by two naked Indians passes through. Bratenahl sits high in the center of the canoe. Now he is dressed in safari gear. As the canoe passes us, we can see that the natives have ear-jacks inserted, with cords running to small radios hung around their naked necks. And we HEAR very faintly the strains of a kind of futuristic rock music. The canoe goes through.

DISSOLVE TO:

69 ON THE FERRY ON THE RIO das MORTES

The entrance to the Mato Grosso jungle north from Xavantina. Bratenahl standing beside a stake-bed truck, staring across at the impenetrable wall of the jungle. Black cuckoo, kingfishers (called *martim pescador*), martins . . . all sit on the cable wire pulling the flat ferry across. On the far shore an ema, an ostrich-like bird, hustles away.

DISSOLVE TO:

70 DEEP JUNGLE

as Bratenahl and a half-breed driving the stake-bed truck bounce down a barely-transversable dirt road. Jungle on all sides. They climb a steep hill, overlooking a valley deep in the heart of the unexplored terrain. The truck stops. CAMERA HAS GONE WITH. Bratenahl and the half-breed step out. They go to the edge of the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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70 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)

hill, looking down into the valley. The half-breed points. Bratenahl nods. He shakes the man's hand, and steps over the edge, toward the valley, on a barely-discernible path. He moves with skill. He doesn't look like a novice at this.

71 ON THE RIDGE

SHOOTING PAST BRATENAHL. CLOSE as he sweeps the area below. Heavy jungle, with the river serpentine through it. But down there, right in the middle, is something odd. As we stare past him we see a die-straight route has been clawed out of the wilderness. It is *incredibly* straight, as wide as an eight-lane superhighway. Because that's what it is. And at the terminus, we see a writhing, boiling mass of darkness that literally seems to be *eating* the jungle. The road extends itself a little farther. And we suddenly realize it is an army of deadly ecitons, the voracious midge ants of the central Mato Grosso, capable of devouring to the bare earth itself incalculable miles of living plants.

BRATENAHL
(idly)
Small snack for the *marabunta* . . .

He strikes off over the ridge, heading down toward the naked horror chewing the jungle below. CAMERA FIXED and he walks away from us.

DISSOLVE TO:

72 EXT. CU – BARROSSO

Uh, Barrosso is an ant. A large, brown-red eciton with a tough and surly demeanor. He is standing on a hand, and he is eating a leaf. We HEAR the VOICE of SIMON HASKELL.

SIMON (O.S.)
I'm not going to argue about it, you were supposed to be through that *caatinga* yesterday. You're dogging it, Barrosso!

The ant looks at him. We HEAR a high, whining, metallic sound that goes on for a moment. CAMERA PULLS BACK to show us Simon, a short barrel-chested man in his late forties; grizzled, tough, like something out of a Ring Lardner or Damon Runyon story, transplanted to the Amazon Basin. He is talking to the ant.

(CONTINUED:)

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72 CONTINUED:

SIMON (CONT'D.)
Don't give me that shit, Barrosso! You made your deal with the project honchos, not with me. You've had all the sugar you're gonna get till you come up to schedule.

BRATENAHL (O.S.)
They tell me when you start talking to the ants it's time to go back to Sao Paulo.

73 2-SHOT – BRATENAHL & SIMON

The short man turns and sees Bratenahl coming through the camp toward him.

SIMON
Who the hell are you?

BRATENAHL
Bob Bratenahl. *Cosmos* Magazine. João from Cachimbo said he set it up with you to see me.

SIMON
Hah! João! That *caboclo*!

BRATENAHL
Speaks very highly of you.

SIMON
For two cruzeiros he'd speak highly of Plague Anna.

BRATENAHL
Don't know her.

SIMON
Killed off half the population of Xavantina with smallpox.
(beat)
She's a legendary figure.

BRATENAHL
So're you.

SIMON
So's João. And that leaves you.

(CONTINUED:)

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73 CONTINUED:

BRATENAHL
Let's be friends.

SIMON
You wouldn't like me. I'm cranky.

BRATENAHL
And you talk to the ants.

SIMON
Only when they give me shit. Just the reverse when people talk to me.

There is a repeat of the high, whining sound. Simon looks down at his hand. Barrosso has finished the leaf.

SIMON (CONT'D.)
(to the ant)
So *take* it to the project honcho. No more sugar till we hit the *campo limpo*.

BRATENAHL
Can he be bribed?

SIMON
He's an eciton, ain't he?

BRATENAHL
I've got a jar of chocolate syrup coming up behind me with a native.

Simon stares at him curiously.

SIMON
I don't know what you want, friend, but you must want it pretty bad.

BRATENAHL
I've got glass beads for the natives, too.

SIMON
Don't worry about them. They won't come within a hundred miles of the *marabunta*.
(to ant)
Listen, Barrosso: you get them dumb chewers back up to peak efficiency, I'll make sure you get drunk on syrup tonight.

The ant makes the sound.

(CONTINUED:)

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73 CONTINUED: – 2

SIMON (CONT'D.)
Okay. You got it.

He sets the ant down, watches it go. Then he turns to Bratenahl. He studies him a moment. Then jerks his head for the reporter to follow him.

74 ANGLE FROM SIMON & BRATENAHL – TO MICRO/TIGHT CU

as the CU MOVE INTO CAMERA and FRAME TO BLACK for an instant as they leave the scene. CAMERA HOLDS for a beat on the jungle and then ZOOMS DOWN AND IN on Barrosso. We HEAR the ridiculous high-pitched sound as if he is getting off one last insult at the human straw-boss, then he scampers off into the jungle and we

DISSOLVE TO:

75 SIMON'S BASE CAMP – NIGHT

HIGH SHOT COMING DOWN THRU leaves of the trees. We HEAR MUSIC. The music we hear is old, old hotel ballroom music. (Specifically: "Does Your Heart Beat for Me" played by Russ Morgan and his Orchestra, recorded 4 January 1939; "Hot Lips" played by Henry Busse and his Orchestra, recorded 25 September 1934; "Nola" played by Vincent Lopez and his Suave Swing Orchestra, recorded 8 January 1940; and "Bubbles in the Wine" played by The Champagne Music Makers of Lawrence Welk, recorded 26 July 1938.) This music continues through the next scene. Down through the trees we can see a vague silvery scintillance. It is a force-field thrown up around the base camp to keep out the insects and animals. CAMERA DOWN to FEATURE the camp as SEEN THRU the SPECIAL EFFECT of the force-field.

76 CAMERA IN THRU FORCE-FIELD

SPECIAL EFFECT as if the camera were moving through a cloud of silver dust. MOVE IN on the scene, shot 77:

77 FULL SHOT – TRUCKING

There in the midst of the Amazon jungle, Simon Haskell has cobbled up for himself a replica of an Art Deco salon. The "walls" of the area are the silvery scintillance of the force-field, through which we can see the jungle as through a veil. But *inside*, in a large cleared space, we see a gorgeous Maples of London dining table and baronial chairs, a birdseye maple side-boy and bar, exquisite deco lamps and cobalt glass vases, mirrors, and a fabulous cobalt glass Spartan radio, circa 1937. It is from the radio that the period

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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77 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)

music emanates. Drinking from ruby-glass goblets and eating off Sévres chinaware, as the Erté and Parrish and Chirico and Brangwyn and Poertzel etchings and blown-glass figures smile down on them, Simon and Bratenahl have their dinner. It looks like something out of a 1930s High Deco film from MGM. Bratenahl is clearly impressed, though bemused. He sips his wine from the ruby-glass goblet and looks around.

BRATENAHL
Nice place you've got here.

SIMON
(wryly)
It's not much, but I call it home.

(beat)
A little more of the Mouton Rothschild?

BRATENAHL
No thanks. I'm walking.

Simon pats at the corners of his mouth with a damask napkin. He sits back and stares at Bratenahl.

SIMON
I like you. You're obviously as bugfuck as I am.

BRATENAHL
Just a quiet country boy trying to make good in the newscast biz.

SIMON
That chocolate syrup was a bold, brilliant stroke.

BRATENAHL
I heard you were cranky. Wanted to come prepared. You should see the crap I'm carrying, just in case.

SIMON
You wouldn't happen to have a Tsuba Samurai sword guard from the Gempei War, would you?

(CONTINUED:)

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77 CONTINUED: – 2

BRATENAHL
I could just kick myself silly for leaving it behind.
(beat)
How about volume one, number two of *Whiz Comics*, with the debut of the original Captain Marvel?

SIMON
What about volume one, number one?

BRATENAHL
There wasn't one.

SIMON
(pleased)
Yeah. You're bugfuck, too.

78 ANOTHER ANGLE

as something large and black throws itself against the force-field. It hits with a thump then runs away.

SIMON
Probably a Harpy Eagle. Don't worry about it. They can't get through the force-field.

BRATENAHL
(waves at the scene around them)
All this. You don't seem the sort of man who'd voluntarily live in the nowhere.

SIMON
(shrugs)
Many reasons; not the least of which is 5,000 credits a day.

BRATENAHL
Even so.

SIMON
Mmm. Well, I used to like to call myself a gadfly. Truth of it is that I'm a troublemaker. There are whole countries where I'm on the endangered species list.

(CONTINUED:)

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78 CONTINUED:

BRATENAHL
And you talk to the ants.

SIMON
Low-level telepathy. Very dull conversationalists. You'd be shocked how little the ecitons know about galactic literature.

BRATENAHL
Which brings us to what you're going to do for me.

SIMON
You're sure I'll do it, whatever it is?

BRATENAHL
Sure.
(beat)
You like me.

SIMON
João said you were "like a man eaten by the sun." He talks like that, bad poetry. But he's right. What's got you by the throat, Bratenahl?

BRATENAHL
Susan Calvin.

SIMON
Ohhhh, so *that's* it. You're after an interview.

BRATENAHL
(disturbed)
I suppose.

SIMON
Another one trying to find out if she was Byerley's mistress, eh?

BRATENAHL
I want to talk to her.

SIMON
Did you ever hear of Machu Picchu, the lost city of the Andes?

Bratenahl nods.

(CONTINUED:)

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78 CONTINUED: – 2

SIMON (CONT'D.)
(closes his eyes, recites)
"Then up the ladder of earth I climbed, through the barbed jungle's thickets . . . Mother of stone and sperm of condors . . . High reef of the human dawn . . ."

(beat)
For five hundred years the headwaters of the Xingú were an Indian fortress. Virtually impenetrable. Source of legend. Site of a great lost city. *Xingú Xavante.* Eldorado . . . Ankor Wat . . . Machu Picchu.

(beat)
Did you know Susan Calvin unearthed it?

BRATENAHL
(amazed)
There's never been a word on the news web.

SIMON
I've been gang-boss in the Mato Grosso for the past six years. That rabble of ants you saw has been eating the Trans-Amazon Highway out of the jungle for the last eight. They got pissed at the boss who had the job before me and cleaned him to the bones one day. Old Earth council has been trying to settle the basin for seventy years. It's a war with the jungle. Until they found a few of us could control the ecitons, it looked hopeless. So this was the most isolated, impenetrable place on the planet.

(beat)
She came here God knows how long ago, found that lost city, built—*or had built for her*—a home under the ruins, and no one goes in without permission.

(beat)
Now do you perceive dimly the enormity of what you're asking me to do?

(CONTINUED:)

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78 CONTINUED: – 3

BRATENAHL
I perceive clearly that you're telling me it can't be done . . . or at least that *you* ain't gonna do it.

79 CLOSE ON SIMON

as he rises, doing a little time-step to Henry Busse's "Hot Lips." He walks toward the force-field, looks out, hands clasped behind his back.

SIMON
You perceive incorrectly; it *can* be done; and I'll do it if I can figure a way.

Bratenahl gets up, pushes away from the table and walks over beside Simon Haskell.

BRATENAHL
Not just because you like me.

80 CU – SIMON'S FACE

There is a tight, serious, strained expression there. He's looking at the past. When he speaks, it is low and slow.

SIMON
João said there's a bastard named Rowe who's squeezing you. I've been squeezed myself.
(beat)
There are better places to be than this fuckin' jungle . . . even for less than 5,000 credits a day.
(beat)
Better places. Cooler places.
(beat)
The enemy of my enemy is my friend . . .

81 FULL SHOT

as they stand there side-by-side, staring into the deadly jungle and we

DISSOLVE TO:

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82 LONG-RANGE TELESCOPIC SHOT – THE JUNGLE – DAY

FROM EXTREME CU – ZOOM OUT TO AERIAL VIEW

(A breathtaking shot. At one with the memorable Victor Fleming trucking boom shot in *Gone With the Wind* that pulls back from an individual soldier to encompass two acres of wounded troops waiting for the train. This shot should just keep expanding and expanding till we are awestruck.)

CU on a blue-silver drop of rain, sliding down an incredibly green leaf. BEGIN ZOOM OUT to show the leaf on a vine. The vine on a piece of weathered stone. The stone one of many in a wall. The wall merely a facet of a ruined structure. The ruined structure a small building that is part of a much larger city now covered with vine and jungle, eaten alive by the hungry foliage. Back and back and back to show the lost city of *Xingú Xavante*. And the city almost lost to the naked eye in the midst of overflowing jungle. Back and back and back, and up till we see the entire basin, the city barely visible. Back and back to the ridge of the basin above.

SIMON (V.O.)
They flourished for a thousand years . . . then the fertile fields went fallow . . . or they lost a battle . . . or the earth trembled . . . and they stopped fighting the jungle, that green eating thing . . . and they died . . . and it was lost . . .
(beat)
Till she came and found it.

BRATENAHL (V.O.)
Dear God! It's incredible!

83 SHOT PAST SIMON & BRATENAHL

as they stand there looking down into the basin.

BRATENAHL
How the hell are you going to get me in there?

SIMON
(mock German)
Ve haff our vays, Herr Bratenahl . . .

CAMERA PAST THEM to the basin view as we

DISSOLVE TO:

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84 DEEP JUNGLE – LATE DAY

CLOSE ON ANTS eating a patch of foliage. A huge, swarming mass of ants. And as they eat away the foliage we see something bright and metallic shining out.

85 SIMON & BRATENAHL

watching from a safe distance as the ecitons chew a patch in the side of the rise. Above the rise we can see the outermost walls of the lost city.

SIMON
Ventilation shaft, maybe. More likely a service tunnel opening.

BRATENAHL
The ants told you it was here?

SIMON
Barrosso. You have no idea what this will cost me, Bratenahl. Tonight, he'll get stinking gorged on sugar and turn maudlin, and I'll have to listen to endless saccharine sentimentality about the brutalized life of the intellectual.

BRATENAHL
I owe you.

SIMON
Pay the debt by not telling them how you got in . . . when they catch you.

Simon steps up to the now completely revealed entrance hatch. He unships a small laser-pencil from his tool belt, and burns away the seal. The port swings open freely. Not a spot of rust on it, not a tendril of plant within. But dark.

86 BRATENAHL

as he watches. Simon finishes, steps back. He extends a hand, inviting Bratenahl to get down on all fours and go in. Bratenahl extends his hand. They shake.

SIMON
I like you, chum. You're bugfuck. But I'll likely never see you again.

Bratenahl summons up a dim smile, drops to all fours, and crawls into the aperture. Into the darkness. Simon closes the port and

(MORE)

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86 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)

wedges it with some thick limbs. He stares at the closed port for a few moments, then turns to the roiling soup of ants waiting nearby.

SIMON (CONT'D.)
Come on, you guys. We've got a road to dig.

SHARP CUT TO:

87 thru 90 SERIES OF FOLLOWING SHOTS – LIMBO SET

behind Bratenahl as he crawls through the smooth, faintly reflective tunnels that bend and curve before him. Every once in a while he passes a dimly glowing plate in the wall of the tunnel, green, that casts a decayed pallor over his mildly trepidatious features. But he keeps crawling.

91 SHOT PAST BRATENAHL TO TUNNEL END

Beyond him, we can see the silvery scintillance of a force-field covering the circular mouth of the service tunnel. Bratenahl crawls to it. He stares at it. He puts his hand up to touch it, but pulls it back at the last moment. He looks down. There is a huge rhino beetle crawling across his hand. He doesn't recoil, merely reaches down, grasps it between thumb and forefinger, and lobs it at the force-field. It hits, there is a spark of power, and the beetle is vaporized. Bratenahl sighs deeply, beaten, and sits back against the tunnel wall, running his hands through his hair. To get this far . . . only to be stopped.

He sits for a few more moments, then crawls forward again, tries to see through the force-field. Dimly, he can see shapes, but it's a dense, powerful field, obviously meant to stop anything up to and including an anaconda that might, miraculously, like the rhino beetle that got in when he entered, slip through into the tunnel. His face is as close to the field as possible without touching it . . . when it abruptly VANISHES. It is gone, and we are looking out past his head to:

92 BRATENAHL'S POV – WHAT HE SEES

An underground garden . . . heaven . . . low, futuristic buildings that are a cross between Peruvian and Oriental, if you can picture such a fabulous, yet architecturally esthetic meld. Open atria filled with plants from all over the galaxy. High towers of glass and silver. A small citylike labyrinth, there under the lost city of the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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92 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)

Amazon. Bratenahl gasps. And then, two pairs of arms reach down from above, into the FRAME, grab him by the shoulders and yank him out. He looks down.

93 DOWN-ANGLE – PAST BRATENAHL'S FEET

He is dangling over an open abyss that plunges many hundreds of feet to the garden below.

94 THE SHOT – FEATURING BRATENAHL – REVERSE ANGLE

He is being held under the arms by two men who resemble the GUARDS we saw in Scene 13. The aperture is high up on a rock mountain wall carved out of the very earth. A ledge above supports the two men in their formal suits and blank expressions. Bratenahl dangling like something out of a Hitchcock film, terrified. They start to pull him up.

95 ON THE LEDGE

as they drag Bratenahl up. He is dropped to his knees on the ledge. Two flitterpaks (individual flying harnesses) lie on the ledge. He gasps for breath, starts to rise.

1st GUARD
Your persistence is illegal, Mr. Bratenahl.

He rises. The two Guards look at him wearily. He is a gnat.

BRATENAHL
I—

2nd GUARD
Invasion of personal space, sir.

He nods. Looks chagrined. Beaten. The Guards look at one another, nod, and shrug into their flitterpaks. Then they get him under the arms again, firmly, and with their free hands punch on the power. They rise from the ledge, sail out and begin to descend.

96 SHOT FROM BELOW

On the trio as it slowly descends. Down they come, holding Bratenahl between them. They bump to a landing. CAMERA IN TO 3-SHOT.

1st GUARD
We'll have to detain you till we reach the authorities, sir.

(CONTINUED:)

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96 CONTINUED:

2nd GUARD
Sorry to inconvenience you, sir.

Bratenahl looks beaten, downcast, embarrassed. He nods and they start to move off. Suddenly Bratenahl lurches into them, slamming one against the other. As they try to regain their footing he plunges off to one side, into the heavy garden foliage. In a moment he's gone from sight.

97 WITH BRATENAHL – ARRIFLEX

running, running, thrashing through the plants, crushing delicate blossoms underfoot, beating his way through the vines, running, running . . .

98 WITH THE GUARDS – ARRIFLEX

as they speak into wrist-communicators. We cannot hear what is said. Then they separate and go after him, running fast.

99 BRATENAHL – ARRIFLEX

running.

100 ON BANKS OF VIDEO SCREENS

in various colors, mostly pastel. Shot after shot of Robert Bratenahl running. Over some of them we get heartbeat readouts, metabolic functions codified. Running!

101 INTERCUTS
thru
105 BETWEEN BRATENAHL and the GUARDS in pursuit.

106 PAST BRATENAHL

as he plunges through a particularly dense stand of foliage, and sees a blue-glass pyramidal structure with terrazzo tiling in a plaza all around it. He smashes through the foliage and boils out onto the plaza. No one in sight. He looks this way and then that, trapped, but ratlike in his necessary panic. A way out! A way to Susan Calvin!

107 ROBOT GUARD POV – WHAT IT SEES

We are looking through the scanner eye of a robot. It has Bratenahl in its viewfinder. Targeted. Broken down into a dozen different images in all the primary colors. Moving in on him.

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108 CLOSE ON BRATENAHL

Wild-eyed, as he turns and we see PAST HIM the robot guard rolling toward him. It is a smooth, low, boxlike affair with grasper arms on extensible limbs. It is coming fast, rolling toward him on trunions.

109 FULL SHOT

as Bratenahl turns and rushes around the blue-glass pyramid structure. And there, in the near distance, is what must be the central house of the underground labyrinth. He rushes toward it, just as a Guard breaks out of the foliage beside him. Without hardly breaking step, Bratenahl swings and clubs the man in the throat. The Guard goes down, rolls back into the foliage. Now Bratenahl is running like an Olympic sprinter, gasping for breath, frantic, but determined.

110 thru 114 SERIES OF SHOTS ON MUSEUM – BRATENAHL'S POV

The large building, with a platform of steps, many steps, leading up to huge carved front doors as great as those on a cathedral. Each SHOT BRINGS IT CLOSER as though we are seeing it through Bratenahl's eyes, as he runs to it. We have the opportunity of scrutinizing its architecture. It is ornately carved and looks as though it is made of banyan wood. But as we get closer we perceive it is one huge molded form, perhaps some untramodern acrylic. And the designs on it show Indian gods, ancient, ominous, but all-knowing.

115 REVERSE ANGLE

from the building, to Bratenahl, tiny before it, running to the structure and up the steps two at a time . . . falling . . . struggling up on hands and knees till he can rise . . . coming on once more . . . determined. In b.g., the Guards and robot.

116 ON THE DOORS

as Bratenahl rushes into the FRAME and throws himself at the doors. They have huge carved handles. He puts his shoulder to one of them, thinking it will be difficult to open, merely because of its size. But it pivots open on a central pin, with utter ease. He stumbles forward from his own momentum and goes crashing through to fall.

117 INT. MUSEUM – PAST BRATENAHL

He raises his head and CAMERA GOES UP AND UP past him to show us this is not a house, not a habitation, but a vast museum

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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117 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)

of artifacts from the lost city of *Xingú Xavante*. Fifty-foot high cyclopean statues of the long-gone Gods of a long-dead people. Terrifying yet somehow wise Gods who ruled over a race that had perished before Cabral discovered Brazil in 1500. Tapestries and stone paintings of a miraculous nature, codifying for even the dullest that the race that created them was wondrous in its intellect and imagination. Amphora and casks; salvers and chests; vases and glass figurines; shields and weaponry; icons and armoires. Rank upon rank of the restored treasures of an unknown culture. But all dominated under that high, arching ceiling by the huge monolithic presences of the Gods, looking down from the dim, shadowed heights.

118 CU – BRATENAHL

stunned by all this. Awestruck and silent. Then he HEARS the sound of pursuit behind him and he rushes forward.

119 EXT. MUSEUM – SHOT UP STAIRS

as the two Guards and the robot reach the top. We see through the open door the dim exterior, and Bratenahl running back through the artifacts.

120 WITH BRATENAHL

as he pushes through a stand of small figures of naked Indian warriors hunting. And as he slides through the group of fifteen or twenty life-sized carvings, he suddenly finds himself staring at . . .

121 CU

Dr. Susan Calvin.

122 CU

Bratenahl, shocked into immobility.

123 2-SHOT

She is holding a splendidly glazed jar, set about with gold trim of anacondas writhing over the surface. She is dusting out dirt with an archeologist's sable-hair brush. She looks at him, and her eyes widen. Bratenahl is stopped.

BRATENAHL
(gasping)
Doctor Cal . . . vin . . . I—

(CONTINUED:)

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123 CONTINUED:

She drops the vase. Bratenahl's eyes follow it down as we GO TO SLOW MOTION and the vase turns lazily in the air and RETURN TO NORMAL SPEED as it impacts and shatters into a billion flaming, amber and gold pieces. It lies there between them, almost symbolically. He looks up and there is fear in her eyes. He stammers wordlessly, then, so ashamed he *cannot* speak, he drops to his knees and tries to gather up the pieces. He picks up several of the largest and rises. He holds them like a dead creature, and looks at her helplessly.

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
I never meant to—

Her hand comes to her mouth. There is such loss, such alienation in her face, that Bratenahl *cannot fail* to understand how he has shattered the moment. Nor can we fail to perceive it. A moment of tragedy.

124 CU – SUSAN CALVIN

as she stares at him and we

FLASH-CUT TO:

125 SUBLIMINAL INTERCUT – A MOMENT – SOLARIZED

Susan, as a child, as we saw her in Scene 40, sitting on the lap of Edward Calvin. He is holding her, and her head is against his chest.

EDWARD (V.O.)
(echo chamber)
Everyone has dreams, honey. The trouble is: most people aren't worthy of the dreams they dream . . .

CUT BACK TO:

126 THE SCENE IN THE MUSEUM

as Susan Calvin shakes her head, and we realize we have been inside her head, remembering what she was remembering. We don't know what it means, but it has a sense of loss that binds us to the shattered moment here and now.

CALVIN
Why are you dogging me like this!?!

BRATENAHL
(imploring)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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126 CONTINUED:

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
Dr. Calvin . . . I never meant . . . you're a legend . . .

CALVIN
(fiercely)
I'm an old woman and I've paid for the right to my solitude. Paid in the highest coin . . .

Behind them we HEAR the Guards coming. Bratenahl turns and looks over his shoulder.

127 BRATENAHL'S POV – WHAT HE SEES

The two Guards coming. The one he punched in the throat is dragging his left leg in a most peculiar fashion. The other one has a stun-gun drawn. The robot slides along with them, its segmented arms waving.

2nd GUARD
(alarmed)
Dr. Calvin! Are you . . . ?

CALVIN (O.S.)
I'm all right. Don't hurt him.

128 WITH BRATENAHL

as he drops the pieces of shattered vase, looks once more at Susan Calvin.

BRATENAHL
Dr. Calvin, I'm no threat to you. I'm from *Cosmos* Magazine. My God, *this is insane*, that I should have to break into your home just to *speak* to you . . . !

CALVIN
Yes, sir, it is.
(beat, cold)
The laws of invasion of personal space were created specifically for people like you.

At that moment a heavy hand drops onto Bratenahl's shoulder. He is spun around. He shoves. The 2nd Guard goes back, falling into the life-size carvings of the hunters. The one dragging his leg comes
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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128 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)

forward. Bratenahl bolts in panic. CAMERA WITH HIM as he dashes into an alcove, finds himself blocked. He is at the feet of one of the great God statues. He cannot get out of the alcove. He starts to climb. CAMERA TRACKS UP WITH HIM as he climbs up the great statue.

129 WITH 2nd GUARD

as he raises the stun-gun, turns a dial on its side (and we are aware it is being adjusted), aims, and fires. A fan-like wave of amber light jumps from the weapon.

130 UP-ANGLE ON STATUE

as Bratenahl climbs across the folded arms of the animal-headed God statue. He rises, just as the bolt strikes him. He freezes, goes limp, totters a moment, then falls.

131 WIDER ANGLE

FEATURING BRATENAHL and the statue as he falls backward, limp as a fish. It is a great distance, perhaps forty feet. Bratenahl plunges toward the stone floor. The 2nd Guard has stepped closer. And as we watch he extends his arms straight out and *catches* Bratenahl. He is barely moved by the action. It is an impressive moment.

132 CLOSE ON BRATENAHL

lying unconscious, but clearly undamaged, in the Guard's arms. ANGLE WIDENS SLIGHTLY as the robot guard, the 1st Guard and Susan Calvin come to them. She looks down at the unconscious reporter.

CALVIN
Leave me alone, sir. I beg you . . . leave me in peace.

And she turns and goes. The 2nd Guard turns INTO CAMERA and carrying Bratenahl high, so his head and upper body dominate the FRAME, he MOVES INTO CAMERA as

FRAME TO BLACK and
MATCH-CUT TO:

133 CU – BRATENAHL

on his head and upper body. We think he is still being carried, but as the CAMERA ANGLE WIDENS we realize he is supine, flat on

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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133 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)

his back, on the ground. But he is moving. How can this be? CAMERA ANGLE WIDENS FARTHER and we see a silent Simon Haskell walking alongside a thick river of ants that disappear *under* Bratenahl. He is being carried through the jungle, back the way he came, on a tide of ecitons. HOLD THIS SCENE and

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

134 INT. COSMOS CENTRAL

CLOSE ON BRATENAHL as in preceding scenes. He opens his eyes. He blinks. We HEAR the VOICE of ROWE OVER.

ROWE (O.S.)
Hell, I don't mind losing my job. I've only been here sixteen years O.E. time. I can always go back to pimping snake-women to the Kiwanis on Altair!

135 FULL SHOT – THE SCENE – DAY

Bratenahl is lying on a translucent-topped table, lying atop films sheets and photographs. This is the central coordinating room of *Cosmos* Magazine. People are bustling around at many kinds of recording and transcribing machines, all very modern and ultra-fast. Rowe stands over him, looking down. The little bulldog editor is righteously pissed-off.

ROWE
Get the fuck up off that comm-sink, you idiot.

Bratenahl tries to rise, cannot. He holds his head, then a hand over his heart.

BRATENAHL
(weakly)
Rowe . . . you got some . . . water . . .

ROWE
Water? You're lucky I don't *drown* your ass in the Silver Sea!

BRATENAHL
Gimme . . .

ROWE
Oh . . . shit!

(CONTINUED:)

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135 CONTINUED:

He goes to a console on the wall, punches a button and gets a bulb of water from the machine. He brings it over, but Bratenahl cannot squeeze it. Rowe lifts his head and squeezes water into his mouth. Now it's very public: a crowd watches.

BRATENAHL
On the eyes . . . put some on my . . . eyes . . .

Rowe rolls his eyes heavenward, but squeezes water out into Bratenahl's pained eyes. Then he helps him to a sitting position. More people join the clutch watching, listening.

ROWE
(exasperated)
How the hell did I inherit you? In what past life did I do such terrible things to rate getting mixed up with a frood like you?

BRATENAHL
I found her, Rowe.

ROWE
(mocking)
You *don't* say!

BRATENAHL
The location was right. She *is* in the Amazon basin, Old Earth . . .

He stops, looks around. Stunned.

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
How did I get *here*?

ROWE
Well, cuddles, the way I get it, they dumped your scaly hide into the jungle and a wandering band of gypsies found you and schlepped you back to the teleport booth and fired you back to me C.O.D.
(beat)
Fastest return in history.
(beat)
The only thing faster are the suits coming up for hearing against this humble
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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135 CONTINUED: – 2

ROWE (CONT'D.)
periodical and your obedient servant. You really boiled it *this* time, Bratenahl!

BRATENAHL
She found a lost city . . . she lives under it . . . the place she lives in, it *had* to've been built with Federation money. Rowe, she *was* tied up with Byerley, she *must* have been!

ROWE
Forget it. You're off it.

BRATENAHL
I can't! I'm close, Rowe. Real close. I *saw* her down there!

ROWE
(screams)
You're *off* it, you stupid sonofabitch! Done! Finished!

136 WITH BRATENAHL

as Rowe stalks away from him, shouldering aside the staff and various onlookers. Bratenahl slides off the comm-sink, holds the edge of the table for a moment as if in extreme pain, then starts after him.

BRATENAHL
Rowe! Hold it! Just *listen* to me!

Rowe is walking toward a long, high blank wall. He suddenly spins on Bratenahl, the crowd splitting like the Red Sea, as Bratenahl reaches him.

ROWE
(playing to the crowd)
I've listened to you enough. Now here's the word: you don't work here no more. And: the Jurisprudence League on Capella 8 pulled your matrix . . . don't try using a teleport booth. You're stuck on ground for the rest of your life, which oughtta be short, if there's any justice!

BRATENAHL
You sonofabitch! *You're* the one shoved
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

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136 CONTINUED:

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
me *into* this! You said you'd back me all the way if they slapped me with invasion of space!

ROWE
(dead calm)
You got proof of that, Bratenahl?

BRATENAHL
Damned right! Comm tape of our conversations.

Rowe smiles a nasty, dirty little smile. Bratenahl knows what's coming, but he can't believe it.

ROWE
(quietly)
I think if you run a scan you'll find nothing like that.

Bratenahl trembles. His jaw tightens. He looks this way and that, looking for another avenue of emotional release than the one he can feel opening before him. Rowe stands there smiling nastily. Bratenahl starts to turn away, then in one fluid, almost martial art manner, pivots on the ball of his foot and brings one up from the hip. His fist slams into Rowe's face, dead high alongside the nose, and Rose is sent thumping into the blank wall. He slips, falls. Sits down hard, half-conscious.

137 FULL SHOT

as the now-overflowing crowd stares disbelievingly. Rowe is hurt. That was no love-tap. Bratenahl starts for him again, takes two steps and stops. He *wants* to get his anger under control. He stands over Rowe with fists balled as the editor groggily tries to stand up, slipping against the wall as an inept club-fighter dazed by repeated pummeling might try to stand up. It is pathetic to see. Finally, he gets up, hanging on the blank wall. He stares at Bratenahl, his face swollen, eye closing.

ROWE
Get outta here. You're dead in the water, son.

TO BE CONTINUED

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GLOSSARY OF FILM TERMS USED IN THIS SCREENPLAY

(Save for reference to Installments two and three)

Every line of work has its special language. Screenplays employ a vocabulary intended as visual shorthand for set designers, cinematographers, directors, and the players. These terms are, for the most part, self-explanatory: they are written for the *camera's eye* . . . what the camera *sees*. The definitions that follow are, with minor variations, generally accepted in film work throughout the industry.

ANGLE WIDENS – The camera pulls back or pans to include additional scene elements within the frame.

ARRIFLEX (OR HAND-HELD) – Using a portable camera where a large camera will not fit or, more often, for closely following swiftly moving action; now often supplanted by STEADICAM, a gyroscopically stabilized camera that can supply a steady picture while moving over any kind of terrain, including up or down stairs. (An "ARRI" was the trade name of the first, French-made, hand-held camera.)

(BEAT) – A pause in speech or action, a hesitation, lasting about a second.

B.G. – Background; those elements in a scene farthest away from the camera.

BOOM SHOT – The camera on a mobile mount, allowing descending from or rising to a vantage point far above normal (eye level) camera height.

CLOSEUP/CU – A shot taken with the camera close, or apparently close, to the subject, which is often a human face filling the frame.

CUT – A rapid switching from one scene or camera setup to another.

DISSOLVE – The last few seconds of one scene overlap the first few seconds of the next; often used to indicate a lapse of time.

DISSOLVE THRU – A transitional lap-dissolve often involving a third, intermediate shot, between the departing shot and the arriving shot, to indicate a sequence of action occupying more time than is shown on the screen.

DOLLY – The physical movement of the camera, either closer (DOLLY IN) or farther back (DOLLY OUT).

ESTABLISHING SHOT – A long shot, usually exterior, which establishes the whereabouts of a scene.

EXT./EXTERIOR – Taking place in the outdoors, whether in a jungle or

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outside a building or spaceship, or in the interstellar reaches of space; often filmed on a set, before a backdrop, or in special effects process.

EXT. CU/EXTREME CLOSEUP – Focusing on a specified element (eyes, an insect), to the exclusion of everything else, so that it fills the frame.

FADE IN/FADE OUT – The gradual appearance/disappearance of an image from/to black.

F.G. – Foreground; those elements in a scene nearest the camera.

(FILTER) – An alteration of sounds to simulate radio transmission or telephone sound.

FLASH CUT – In actuality, a cut is simply a cut. From one shot to another. But SMASH-CUTS, FLASH-CUTS, and SHARP CUTS serve to indicate that the transition is meant to shock the eye. It is what lies on the other *side* of the CUT that obtains here. For instance, a cut from a knife descending on a victim, to a butcher's cleaver hacking a side of beef, would be a SMASH-CUT. Dramatic impact is the deciding factor for identification.

FRAME – The total image, top-to-bottom and side-to-side, recorded by the camera; analogous to a picture frame surrounding a portrait . . . and the portrait.

FREEZE-FRAME – Stopping the onscreen action by optically duplicating the same single frame of film.

FULL SHOT – All the elements of a scene as seen by the stationary camera. People seen head-to-toe. Often called a MASTER SHOT.

HIGH ANGLE – The camera shoots from 'way above the scene.

HOLD – The camera remains stationary to concentrate on the indicated subject, for dramatic effect.

INT./INTERIOR – Taking place indoors, whether in a corridor, a spaceship cabin, or a tunnel. Think of it having a ceiling.

LAP-DISSOLVE – See DISSOLVE.

LIMBO SET – An all-black set, with little or no furniture and no horizon. Sometimes called an INFINITY SET.

LONG SHOT – A shot in which the object of principal interest is, or appears to be, far removed from the camera.

LOW ANGLE – Shooting from a position closer to the floor than normal camera height (eye level).

MATCH-CUT – A cut in which one or more elements in the second scene

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are identical in some fashion to element(s) of the same visual size in the preceding scene, to establish symbolic linkage.

MATCH-DISSOLVE – Analogous to match-out, only with the slower transition of a dissolve.

MED. LONG SHOT – Intermediate in distance between a medium shot and a long shot.

O.S. – Offscreen. Out of the frame, but a character still physically present in the scene.

PAN – The tracking of an otherwise stationary camera from left to right, or vice versa.

POV – Point of view. Shot from the indicated character's vantage point: what s/he sees.

REVERSE ANGLE – Looking back toward the previous angle from the opposite side; often used to look back at one of the characters in a 2-SHOT.

SHARP CUT – At a faster tempo than the customary CUT transition.

SMASH-CUT – Faster even than a FLASH-CUT, usually with a violent impact on the viewer.

SOFT-EDGE WIPE – A kind of wipe in which the boundary line between the two shots is softened or blurred.

STOCK (MEASURE) – Footage from a film library of oft-repeated shots of general application: establishing, time-lapse; sky, cities, snow-storms, highways, etc.

STOP-MOTION – A form of animation where each frame of film is shot individually, the action varying minutely between each shot to give a sense of uninterrupted motion when projected at full speed.

TRACKING SHOT/TRUCKING SHOT – See DOLLY.

2-SHOT – A shot containing two characters, as a rule close to the camera. 3-SHOT has a corresponding meaning.

V.O. – Voice over. Words spoken by a character not physically present or present at another time. Used for telepathy and recall of memories.

WIPE – An optical effect in which a second shot appears and wipes the first off the screen along a visible line.

ZOOM – Real or apparent motion of the camera toward its subject, at great speed, often accomplished with a lens of variable magnification.

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I, ROBOT: Chronology

1952 Alfred Lanning is born.
1964 Edward Calvin is born.
1990 U.S. Robots Corp. is founded by Robertson; Alfred Lanning, first Director, age 38.
1991 Edward Calvin marries Stephanie Ordway; he is age 27.
1992 Edward Calvin joins U.S. Robots Corp., age 28.
1994 Susan Calvin is born; Stephanie dies in childbirth.
1997 Norman Bogert is born.
1999 Edward Calvin marries Belinda; Susan is age 5.
2000 "Robbie"; Susan is age 6; fight with Lanning; pogroms.
2004 Edward Calvin dies after 12 years at U.S. RoboMek; Susan is age 10.
2015 Susan joins U.S. RoboMek, age 21.
2022 Donovan and Powell work with Susan on Mercury; "Runaround".
2028 "Liar!"; Susan is 34; Lanning is 76; Bogert is 31.
2030 Donovan and Powell discover secret of interstellar travel accidentally. (Mentioned in screenplay but not dramatized. Asimov's story "Escape!")
2032 Susan develops multi-purpose robot; "Lenny."
2033 Teleportation booth concept is discovered as an offshoot of discovery of interstellar travel.
2034 Four Worlds War begins.
Lanning records his memoirs at age 82.
2035 Stephen Byerley begins his political career.
Alfred Lanning dies, age 83.
2036 Byerley is taken on tour of EarthCentral computer banks. Stephen Byerley founds and becomes First President of the Galactic Federation.
Susan Calvin is age 42.
2038 Stephen Byerley ends the Four Worlds War.
2049 Film sequence of Byerley on trimaran.
2054 Norman Bogert is cryonically frozen, age 57.
2055 Susan Calvin retires, vanishes into seclusion, age 61.
2076 Stephen Byerley dies.
Robert Bratenahl begins his search.
Susan Calvin dies, age 82.

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(Continued from page 17)

the day came when we painted our last miniature.

But recently my six-year-old son expressed an interest in painting figures and, after acquiring new paints to replace the old set, I was passing the tradition on, like some demented Swiss watch maker. . . . "No, my son, you must apply the dry brush lightly to the figure. Yes, that's it!"

My son's first figure resembled a melted marshmallow that had been dipped in ketchup, but he's become quite good. It's fun to do together, even if you don't play the game that involves the miniature. There are, of course, serious "miniaturists" who carry complete armies in special cases, from the detailed Napoleonic foot soldiers to the ragtag troops of the Confederacy. A full-scale miniature game, on terrain, is something to see.

There are a number of outstanding miniature companies which would be glad to send you a catalog of their line of figures. RAFM Company Inc. (19 Concession Street, Cambridge, Ontario, Canada N1R 2G6) produces award-winning military miniatures (like the recent Union and Confederacy series) as well as some unique fantasy sets. Their *Shadows & Steel* set comes with a background story, role-playing instructions, a map, and a set of smashing figures. *Vampyres of Tandaloor* has a remarkably detailed coffin and Nosferatu (from the classic silent film) himself. Grenadier Models Inc. (Holmes, PA 19043) is the company that got me started and they carry a number of license-series, from the appropriately gruesome *Call of Cthulhu* to the familiar figures of Batman and Superman for Mayfair Games' *DC Heroes*.

One of the greatest figures I ever received was a birthday present, a limited edition Imperial Dragon from Ral Partha Enterprises Inc. (P.O. Box 9116, Cincinnati, OH 45209). It's still unpainted inside its box, but someday I look forward to laboring over this massive hunk of metal. Ral Partha makes some remarkable fantasy combinations, like the *Dwarf Steam Canon*, with three dwarfs manning a Tolkienish-piece of artillery, and the *War Eagle*, with its warrior rider.

Citadel is a British company that has been releasing some high quality miniatures through Games Workshop U.S. (8920A Route 108, Columbia, MD 21045). A good way to keep up with Citadel and other miniature companies is Games Workshop's magazine *White Dwarf* which features a "Heavy Metal" column with some terrific color photographs of miniatures.

Just painting miniatures is fun, but playing with them in games can be exciting. In a future issue of *IAsfm*, I'll talk about using miniatures in a variety of games, from *Star Trek* (and the upcoming *Star Wars*) to *Rune Quest*, and I'll also take a look at this year's award-winning figures. ●

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ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

"This Was Madness. . . ."

In Conquest Born
By C. S. Friedman
DAW, $3.95 (paper)

Oh, boy, what a stew! If novels came in cans, the label on C. S. Friedman's *In Conquest Born* would have a list of ingredients as long as your arm (and some of those ingredients would be artificial). And the recipe is equally complicated. Let's see if we can boil it down.

It's the twelfth millennium of some era or other (probably not ours), and "The War That Could Not Be Ended" has been going on for ten thousand years (give or take a thousand) around and among hundreds of inhabited planets. The antagonists are as different as day and night. There's the Azean Star Empire. The Azeans are: gold-skinned and white-haired; judicious; scientifically inclined; genetically skilled; tolerant of women, aliens, and psychics; and usually right-handed. They are ruled by a kindly but stern Emperor with a lot of horse sense, who is impatient with the complex rituals of the Imperial Court but understands their necessity.

On the other hand, there's the Braxana, ruling class of the planet Braxi, and their "Holding," i. e., all the planets ruled by the ruthless Braxana. They are: war-loving; averse to women save for sex, progeny, and running their households; bred for generations for beauty and strength; ebon-haired and white-skinned; pathologically against anyone with psychic powers; and almost always left-handed. They are ruled by a loose federation of the heads of the aristocratic houses, who are perpetually in a state of Byzantine intrigue.

And then there is the Institute for the Acceleration of Human Psychic Evolution, supposedly in the Azean sphere, but with aims and goals of its own, having worked for hundreds of generations to develop psychic powers in humankind.

The two sides of the war have been equally balanced for millennia, though the Border has rolled back and forth (zap! there goes a planet of two-and-a-half million people—shades of E. E. Smith!). Now each side has produced, unknowing, an extraordinary individual. Zatar of the Braxana is as ruthless as his fellows, but is determined to change the direction of Braxana culture. The elite are dangerously reduced in numbers due to war losses and the genetic

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weaknesses of inbreeding. On the other side, Anzha lyu Mitethe, despite the Azeans' rigid genetic controls, is some sort of throwback; she has blood-red hair and skin as white as a Braxin. Horrors! And then her parents (big wheels in science and government) are killed by a Braxin who has penetrated the heart of the Empire. Anzha is a superpsychic, and is taken under the wing of the Institute, which programs her for its own purposes.

The novel (and it's a long one) chronicles the histories of these two, sometimes directly, sometimes obliquely with incidents in the lives of other characters (there's a large supporting cast) as it affects them. Anzha is involved in all sorts of goings-on: attends the Academy of Martial Sciences; makes a years-long trek across the ice plains of the planet Derleth to prove to the natives that the Empire is worth joining; commands an experimental warship; takes part in battle after battle. (Zap—there goes a planet of five billion people!) She also has the slight problem that any man she goes to bed with is killed by her complicated psi powers. Zatar endlessly intrigues against his own people to change the course of the culture while taking part in battle after battle against the Azeans. (Zap—there goes etc.!)

Obviously these two were meant for each other.

When they finally meet, face to face at a peace conference, he's expecting her to drop dead from a nasty, time-controlled poison she's been slipped. She doesn't, but they take one look and Earths move! The universe trembles! When battle joins again, things are even more complicated (not to mention that Zatar was the agent who assassinated Anzha's parents).

There's a good deal going on in this epic and Friedman handles it quite well, including the endless interesting details of the various cultures involved. The large cast is more or less kept identifiable (though a few that appear early on and then reappear after four hundred pages pose some problems). However, the writing is pretty corny at times ("This was madness!" Zatar thinks when he and Anzha tangle for the first time). In general, the effect is that of a *Star Trek* novel co-written by Jackie Collins and Harold Robbins, and a lot of people will have a good time with it.

Never-Never Encyclopedia

Encyclopedia of Things That Never Were

By Michael Page and Robert Ingpen

Viking, $19.95

Like some people we know, the *Encyclopedia of Things That Never Were* by Michael Page and Robert Ingpen is very attractive at first glance, and has about all the depth of a TV news broadcast. It's one of those books one buys on impulse because it looks so good, and then when one checks out the content . . .

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The entries are divided into six categories called "Creatures of. . . .": "The Cosmos"—gods and such like; "The Ground and Underground"—brownies, amazons, and the Sphinx; "Wonderland" —Toad Hall, Treasure Island, Atlantis et al.; "Magic, Science and Invention"— Frankenstein's monster, crystal balls, and flying saucers; "Water, Sky and Air" —mermaids, frogs, and Grendel; and "The Night"—voodoo, owls, and menahunes.

The divisions seem arbitrary —why, for instance, is Pan not with his fellow major immortals in "The Cosmos," but lumped in with the Minotaur and gremlins in "The Ground and Underground"? And necromancy by its name and nature would seem more of "The Night" than just another bit of "Magic, Science and Invention." The inclusion of such literary inventions as Toad Hall leads one to hope for an encyclopedic handling of the great creations of fantasy such as Islandia and Middle-Earth, but it soon becomes painfully obvious that anything that has a current copyright has been excluded. Generally it's a roundup of your more basic mythology with a sprinkling of esoterica (Hawaiian, Australian, and Amerindian), plus some obvious literary classics.

The illustrations are indeed lavish in the Time-Life school of lavish, and are certainly more interesting as fantasy illustration than most of the book covers we're being inflicted with these days. But in general, this book is really only good for a gift from a loving aunt to a younger adolescent who needs a good grounding in Fundamental Fantasy I.

The Forest, Prime Evil

Rumors of Spring
By Richard Grant
Bantam, $16.95 (hardcover), $8.95 (paper)

It's about five centuries hence, and the world's a mess. Civilization is limping along on vastly depleted resources, and doesn't really have the strength to cope with the latest threat, which is vegetation. The Earth's flora has gone amok, specifically the Forest. That's *the* Forest, the only one to survive the toxic wastes, acid rains, and whatall that devastated the globe just post-twentieth century. The Forest is sending out unconquerable trees and plants that are Taking Over, particularly *Quercus rabidinus,* or rabid oak.

"The First Bionic Crusade" is mounted from one of the last outposts of civilization to penetrate the Forest and its secrets, specifically to find the experimental station within it that five hundred years ago may have been the root cause of the vegetable revolt. Even more specifically, it is looking for the notebooks of one experimental biologist, Amy Hayata, who was killed in the general anarchy of the times. The expedition consists of a mixed lot of people, and is mounted in a sort of land-going ship, on the front of which is a giant shredding

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disc, the better to beat its way through the jungle. . . .

Back in civilization (or what's left of it), there's mounting opposition against the Crusade, and the opposition is not only from the antiscientific cult of Pure Force, militant youths who generally feel that the vegetable rebellion is divine retribution for humanity's misdeeds. There's also skullduggery in the Establishment, as the Low Commissioner seeks to take over from the Governor, who heads the Crusade.

Don't expect an adventure tale of dauntless heroic types besting the mutated man-eating plants of the future, or a sociologically significant story of the attempts of a deprived posterity to overcome the ecological sins of the past. There are certainly elements of both in the novel, but Grant has a goofy approach which is nicely different from almost anything being published today. The Crusade's mad crew consists of the Governor, Lord Tattersall, and his accountant, Sheldrake, a sort of Mutt and Jeff team; a bearlike engineer and a female journalist; the runaway stepdaughter of the intriguing Low Commissioner and a seedy representative of the Pure Force militants, who has gotten aboard by mistake.

In fact, they're all more or less there by mistake, since the expedition *was* to be manned by the Hardy Plant Society, a sort of garden club. But the Expeditionary Transport Vehicle took off on its own, taking all the wrong people with it. Once in the Forest, they discover a wild adolescent boy (who bears a curious resemblance to Amy Hayata's son as seen in moving hologhosts they find at the ancient experimental station) whom the runaway girl dubs Tamlin. Meanwhile back on the homefront, various unlikely events occur: Lady Widdershins' poodle, Paracelsus, chews his way through an already dubious drainpipe, surrounding her mansion with a moat of sewage, and the Brigade of Irregular Poets crashes the annual St. Swithins Day Bull Roast.

There's too much in this gaga saga to chronicle here, but, again, don't assume it's just a dismissable romp. Despite the surface silliness, Grant is a writer to be taken seriously, and despite the trappings of fun and fantasy, he knows his botany well enough to present the Forest as a formidable force, evoking phenomes and transpiration and such like, as well as Amy Hayata's curious but convincing theory of genetic self-manipulation which creates the whole situation to begin with.

To make the second mainstream allusion this month, the comparison that comes to mind is to Ronald Firbank (what—you don't know that never-never novelist from early in this century who is having something of a revival in Britain these days! Well, you should . . .). If Ronald Firbank had written science fiction, the unlikely result would

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be something like *Rumors of Spring*.

Twice-Told Tale

The Shadow of His Wings

By Bruce Fergusson
Arbor House, $16.95

So a hick from the mining country moves to the big walled city, goes to work in the local tavern, gets dragooned into the militia to fight off the latest invaders of the Kingdom, joins the quest to urge the local dragon to help in the war, wins the heart of the dragon and the girl, and ends up being offered the Crown.

So what else is new?

Bruce Fergusson, in *The Shadow of His Wings,* has taken a very basic plot indeed. In the hands of many authors, it would have turned out to be bo-o-o-o-ring as well as familiar. But it all depends on how it's handled—in fact, that's what's meant by style and Fergusson has gone and given some style to this old situation.

It's the usual slightly-above-barbaric fantasy kingdom, by name Myrcia. The hick, who tells the story, is a nice guy called Lukan Barra who has come to the big city of Castlecliff, leaving his older brother, Vearus, to carry on the family tradition of mining. This is the result of a fairly complex father/sons/siblings relationship, and ends in Vearus following his brother when their mother dies. There is a love/hate relationship between the brothers, with the emphasis on hate in Vearus's case. He's a real lowlife, gets into trouble (easy enough to do in badly ruled Myrcia) and is sent into exile.

A few months later he returns, with the ability to heal almost any sort of wound or ill, and becomes the second most powerful man in the country.

When the neighboring kingdom invades, Myrcia's ruler offers to turn over the throne to anyone who can bribe Rizzix, The Erseiyr, to help them out. Rizzix, it turns out, is a very large dragon—*very* large—who collects an annual tribute, but just might want more treasure. Lukan, who has been in one of the first major battles of the war, and then in one of Myrcia's really unpleasant prisons, rather illogically goes off on the quest. In the meantime, he's gotten involved with an ex-lover of Vearus's, the bed-hopping Rui Ravenstone, who keeps alternately betraying him and rescuing him.

The subsequent events are inventive. Rizzix turns out to be not what you'd expect in the way of dragons (though still awesome). The decorations on the plot get complex, and there are surprises on the way, such as from where Vearus gets his healing powers. The author keeps the story going at whirlwind pace; there's a heap of material packed into its relatively short length.

But more than that, Fergusson gives his fantasy a different flavor. It's all determinedly macho; this is anti-romantic fantasy with hair on its chest. Nobody's cute, whimsical,

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or funny. Fergusson is apparently one of those authors who believes that the more unpleasant the detail, the more realistic the writing, and the story's full of phlegm, blood, sewage, rape (mostly male), roaches, and other currently fashionable matters. Some of it is perhaps gratuitous—that depends on your stomach for such things. But you won't soon forget Lukan's foray into Rizzix's mouth (which is not uninhabited), or even more memorably, the dragon taking revenge by showering his entire hoard on the city (tons of gold coins, cups, shields, etc. dropped from a good height can really wreak havoc).

Postgrad Magic

So You Want to Be a Wizard
By Diane Duane
Dell, $2.75 (paper)

Anything with the title of *So You Want to be a Wizard* has got to be for kids, right? Diane Duane's book of that title was published in hardcover a couple of years ago, and is now in paperback. It's published by a juvenile line (Laurel-Leaf). It has a couple of kids and a dragon on the cover. And its heroine is a thirteen-year-old girl who is blessedly not going through the usual novelized *angst* of fictional adolescence. She simply finds a magic book and subsequently has some fantastic adventures. Got to be meant strictly for the sub-teen set.

Uh-uh. Duane may have set out to write a book for juveniles, but she's the author of some pretty sophisticated adult fantasies (*Door into Fire* and *Door into Shadow*). Here she's written a story that I fear, with all due respect, few of the younger crowd, with its music-video attention-span, will twig into. But it's a pleasure for adults who are not snobs about books with young protagonists. The girl, Nita, does indeed find a book titled *So You Want to Be a Wizard* and it opens the door onto one of the most high-tech and complex systems of magic ever created. (In brief, the point of wizardry is to slow down entropy and therefore put off the death of the Universe.)

She and a fellow student of the Art, as their first effort, manage to evoke a sentient white hole, whom they dub Fred. The three of them set out on a simple quest to recover a lost pen, and suddenly they're involved in an epic adventure searching for the *Book of Night with Moon* which has written in it a record of everything in the Universe(s). It has been stolen by the Lone One, He who was cast out at the beginning and brought Death and Entropy into the Universe(s).

This involves, among lots of other things, a confrontation with the Lone One in an alternate New York City, unpeopled but filled with predatory helicopters with talons instead of skids, dragons in the subway system, and feral cars and taxis roaming the streets in search of prey. (Nita's friend Kit does an Androcles-and-the-lion act on a wounded Lotus Esprit, who eventually saves the day.) The cli-

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max features the Sun in *our* Universe going out for a few minutes.

You may have to look in the juvenile section of the bookstore for this one, but it's well worth the embarrassment.

History, Mystery, & Fantasy

The Devil in Velvet

By John Dickson Carr
Carroll & Graf, $3.95 (paper)

The Devil in Velvet is not a new book, dating as it does back to the 1950s. And neither it nor its author, John Dickson Carr, is that wellknown to readers of fantasy and science fiction, unless they also happen to be mystery buffs. But its welcome republication comes at a time when there seems to be a rising interest in fantasies with historical overtones (or historical novels with fantasy overtones), and is therefore well worth noting.

Its premise is a simple one. Nicholas Fenton, a twentieth-century academic, becomes obsessed with a murder that occurred in Restoration London—in 1675, to be exact. He knows the circumstances of the murder—a young woman of the aristocracy slowly done in by arsenic—and those of the household that are involved (husband, servants, friends, enemies such as the husband's mistress). But no historical records reveal the crucial fact of—whodunnit?

So Fenton moves into the house in which the victim lived, and makes a bargain with the devil to return to 1675 to inhabit the body of the victim's husband (also named [Sir] Nicholas Fenton, but *not* an ancestor, so far as the modern Fenton can determine).

What results is a slambang mystery-history-fantasy. The mystery of who is slowly doing in the lovely Lydia with arsenic is complicated by the question of whether the modern Fenton can change history and stop it. The history is brilliantly evoked—Carr obviously knows this period to a fare-thee-well, including minute matters of London geography, Restoration manners and mores, and the finer points of the difference between seventeenth-century and modern English. And the fantasy is not just confined to the gimmick at the beginning, but is present throughout as the detailed Restoration milieu is viewed through modern eyes, with a leisureliness and attention to detail that the usual time-travel story doesn't take time to bother with. If you're afraid that this means it has all the action of an historical treatise, I haven't even mentioned the periodic swordplay. And the Devil turns up again, as well as someone else from this century. As for whodunnit?, it's one of those *really* tricky "I-should-have-thought-of-that" solutions.

Shoptalk

Works by Philip K. Dick continue to be published posthumously. The cult will be interested in the nongenre novel, *Mary and the Giant* (Arbor House, $16.95) . . . As ever, keeping you up on the latest per-

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mutations of series old and new, note *To the Stars* by Harry Harrison, which is the one-volume edition of the trilogy consisting of *Homeworld, Wheelworld,* and *Starworld* (Bantam, $4.95, paper). . . . On the other hand, that author's "Deathworld Trilogy," until recently available in one volume, is now being re-issued in single volumes, beginning, logically enough, with *Deathworld* (Ace, $2.95, paper).

Recent publications from those associated with this magazine include: *Isaac Asimov's Magical Worlds of Fantasy #8: Devils* edited by Isaac Asimov et al., NAL, 3.50 (paper); *Demons!* edited by Jack Dann and Gardner Dozois, Ace, $3.50 (paper).●

NEXT ISSUE

It's *that* time of year again, and in keeping with long tradition, our December issue features a Christmas story—in fact, it features *three* of them! First up is our December cover story, "To Hell with the Stars," by **Jack McDevitt**, a lyrical little piece with a hidden sting in its tail, about the dangers and potentials of reawakening that Sense of Wonder we all hear so much about. Then Hugo-and-Nebula winner **Connie Willis** spins a "Winter's Tale," an elegant and intricate pavane of identity and star-crossed love, the kind of story meant to be read in front of a roaring fire with a slow heavy fall of snow coming down outside. And, rounding out our Yuletide trio, **Ben Bova** returns to these pages after too-long an absense with "Silent Night," a taut thriller about the men and women who have to earn Peace On Earth, 365 days a year.

The rest of our December issue takes us far from seasonal locales: Nebula-winner **Lucius Shepard** takes us to postwar Vietnam for another of his hard-hitting and tough-minded stories, this one a look at some *very* scary "Shades"; **Marc Laidlaw** shuttles us off to the Himalayas for an eerie tale of mystery and magic, in "Shalmari"; and, of course, **Harlan Ellison** returns with the second installment of his monumental serial *I, Robot: The Movie,* already being talked about as one of the publishing events of the year. Plus an array of columns and features. Look for the December issue on your newsstands on October 20, 1987.

COMING SOON: new stories by **Howard Waldrop, Pat Cadigan, Michael Bishop, Charles Sheffield, Robert Silverberg, Bruce McAllister, Connie Willis, Avram Davidson, Lisa Goldstein, Harry Turtledove, Isaac Asimov,** and many others.

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

There are two traditional big-city cons coming up in November. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, & a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 (business)(envelope) at 4271 Duke St. #D-10, Alexandria VA 22304. The hot line is (703) 823-3117. If a machine answers, leave your area code & number. I'll call back on my nickel. Early evening's a good time to phone cons (most are home numbers) (be polite). When writing, enclose an SASE. Look for me at cons behind the iridescent Filthy Pierre badge, with a music keyboard.

SEPTEMBER, 1987

18-20—**MosCon.** For info, write: **Box 8521, Moscow ID 83843.** Or call: **(288) 882-0364 or 882-3672** (10 am to 10 pm, not collect). Con will be held in: Moscow ID (if city omitted, same as in address). Guests will include: Jack ("The Humanoids") Williamson, artist Steve Gallacci, fan Lorna Toolis, Algis Budrys, F. M. Busby. At Cavanaugh's Motor Inn. The big little con in the Northwest.

18-20—**CopperCon. (602) 968-5673.** Ambassador Hotel, Phoenix AZ. Relaxacon to rest up from NASFiC.

18-20—**Triangulum. (414) 327-7325.** Red Carpet Inn Airport, Milwaukee WI. G. Martin, D. Schmidt.

OCTOBER, 1987

2-4—**ConTradiction, Box 2043, Newmarket Stn., Niagara Falls NY 14301.** Anne McCaffrey, Joan Vinge.

2-4—**TusCon, Box 26822, Tucson AZ 85726. (602) 881-3709.** S. (Mall World) Sucharitkul, Ed Bryant.

9-11—**RoVaCon, Box 117, Salem VA 24153. (703) 389-9400.** Ben ("Colony") Bova, artist Kelly Freas, Hal ("Mission of Gravity") Clement, C. (Warlock) Stasheff. Out of the high school, at the Civic Center.

9-11—**ConStellation, % NASFA, Box 4857, Huntsville AL 35815.** J. ("Superman") Schwartz. Low key.

9-11—**NonCon, Box 4506, Edmonton AB T6E 4T7.** B. Hambly, George Barr, E. Vonarburg, Janis Svilpis.

9-11—**ArmadilloCon, Box 9612, Austin TX 78766. (512) 443-3491/8-3630.** Sterling, Beacham, Cadigan.

16-18—**ICon, Box 525, Iowa City IA 52244. (319) 396-6487.** Coralville IA. G. Cook, Joe Haldeman.

16-18—**NecronomiCon, Box 2076, Riverview FL 33569. (813) 677-6347/973-0038.** Tampa FL. F. Pohl.

16-18—**SoonerCon, Box 1701, Bethany OK 73008.** Oklahoma City OK. R. Bailey, artist David Cherry.

16-18—**ByCon, Box 3977 Stn. C, Ottawa ON K1Y 4P2.** By the Bytown Futurists. Holiday Inn Market Sq.

30-Nov. 1—**World Fantasy Con, Box 22817, Nashville TN 37202.** Piers Anthony, artist Kelly Freas, Charles L. Grant, Karl Edward Wagner, Val & Ron Lindahn. Join quick for $50 (will sell out fast).

NOVEMBER, 1987

6-8—**WindyCon, Box 432, Chicago IL 60690.** The big Chicagoland SF convention of the year.

13-15—**PhilCon, % PSFS, Box 8303, Philadelphia PA 19101.** Philly's big annual do, at Adam's Mark.

SEPTEMBER, 1988

1-5—**NoLaCon II, 921 Canal #831, New Orleans LA 70112. (504) 525-6008.** WorldCon '88. $60 in '87.

AUGUST, 1989

31-Sep. 4—**Noreascon 3, Box 46, MIT PO, Cambridge MA 02139.** Boston MA. The 1989 World SF Con.

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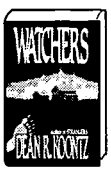

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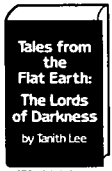

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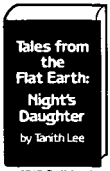

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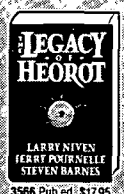

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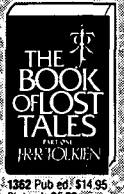

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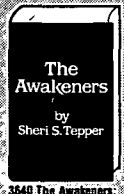

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